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THE TORCH-BEARERS OF BOHEMIA

Kryzhanovskaia, Vera Ivanovna.

THE TORCH-BEARERS OF BOHEMIA

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY

JULIET M. SOSKICE

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NOTE

THIS story, which has been awarded Honorable Mention by the Imperial Academy of Science of Petrograd, is the work of a living writer; but its scene is laid in past times, in the days of John Hus and his contemporaries. Although it is full of exciting incident as a story, "The Torchbearers of Bohemia" seeks also to give a picture of the life of Bohemia at the beginning of the Fifteenth Century, and to show the intense hatred, which persists to this day, of the Czechs (or Bohemians, as they are called throughout) for their Teutonic oppressors. In such high-colored passages as those connected with the trial of Hus, or the revolt in Prague upon the death of King Venceslas, the author is so clearly combining her vivid sense of historical color with intense sympathy for the Hussite cause, that this personal conviction unquestionably adds to the "immediacy" of the passionate scenes, and brings them leaping to the eye. Hus, to the writer, is the hero of the book, in spite of all the heroic virtues of Jerome and Vok; while the villain is not so much Brancaccio as the whole assembly of the clerical abuses, against which Hus thundered his denunciations. Wickedness in plenty is here of a personal and quite privately terrible kind; but then so is one lurid aspect of the history of a fierce religious conflict. And so moved has the author been by the tragic figure of Hus, and by the con-

sciousness of the loyalty he inspired in his followers, that she has shown these things wonderfully set among the baser and more violent happenings of those days. The story consists of many stories; but they are all unified and made significant for us in virtue of the dominating personality of Hus.

THE TORCH-BEARERS OF BOHEMIA

THE TORCH-BEARERS OF BOHEMIA

PART I

I

On a beautiful summer's day in the year 1401 a large company on horseback was proceeding through the narrow, winding streets of Pilsen. At its head rode a man of about thirty-five, slight, but well-built, with an exceedingly dark complexion of the pronounced Italian type. The undeniable beauty of his face was marred by a smile of sugary beatitude which was not in harmony with it; his cunning black eyes also produced a disagreeable impression: there was a hint of something cruel lurking in their depths. He wore a splendid suit of black velvet, with a light steel breastplate, while his head was adorned by a cap with feathers, which sat jauntily upon his jet-black curls. Into his belt was thrust a dagger with an embossed handle, while a sword of imposing size hung at his side. In sharp contrast with this worldly and warrior-like attire was the big cross which hung

from a golden chain upon his breast, and the episcopal ring which he wore upon one finger outside his deerskin glove. This Bishop bravely bestrode a magnificent black charger, and blessed the passers-by as he went. His helmet, shield, lance, and other pieces of armor were carried behind him by four pages; then followed an imposing retinue; while several heavily-laden mules completed the procession.

The Bishop stopped before a house situated not far from the town walls. It was a large house, with a high, pointed roof, ornamented with wooden carvings. It had been built by a barrel-maker grown rich, and at one time it had in no way differed from the houses of other burghers. But Lord Ginek Waldstein, who had bought the house, had added to it several crenelated turrets, and surrounded it by a thick wall, so that the modest, peaceful-looking tradesman's house had acquired the aspect of a fortified castle.

The Bishop was evidently expected, for his foot-boy had scarcely knocked at the wicket before the gates in the wall were flung open, and an old serving-man ran to meet him. This man quickly helped the Bishop to alight from his horse, and informed him that the Count was absent; but he added that the Countess was awaiting Bishop Brancaccio, and had directed that His Eminence be straightway conducted to her.

At the head of the staircase the Countess herself courteously and respectfully greeted her illustrious guest and inquired concerning his health.

"I am well, praise God. Nevertheless, my fair cousin, I would ask shelter of you for some days. The long journey on horseback has caused the old wound I received in my youth to trouble me; and I should like to rest."

"My whole house is at the disposal of Your Eminence. You will pardon us if we cannot afford you sufficient ease."

"Why, verily, a poor monk requires but little! One thing I would beg—that my page Richiotto be accommodated near me. I often need his services, and therefore must have him close at hand."

An hour later, thoroughly refreshed by a hearty supper, the Bishop was sitting alone with his cousin, in her chamber, far remote from indiscreet ears.

The Countess Waldstein was a tall, fair, thin woman, just under forty. Her face, with its aquiline nose and wide, thin-lipped mouth, was not attractive. Even her beautifully-shaped, large, black eyes were no ornament to her, on account of their cunning and evil expression. The meekness she affected was at variance with the haughtiness which was perceptible in her, and which evidently lay at the root of her character. Countess Jan was a relation of Bishop Brancaccio's on her mother's side, and there were evidences of her Italian blood in her almost fanatical bigotry, and in the duplicity of her nature.

She watched her guest with uncontrollable impatience, but he did not appear to notice her anxiety, and con-

tinued indifferently to finger the chain which hung about his neck, and to clank the spurs which he had not yet removed. At length she could contain herself no longer, and, bending toward the Bishop, she said, in a low voice, speaking in Italian:

"Well, Cousin Thomasso, what news have you brought me?"

The Bishop sat up straight in his chair.

"Bad news, Madonna Giovanna. My mission hath failed completely."

"The Baron would consent to nothing?" murmured the Countess, turning pale.

"To scarcely anything. I will relate to you fully my conversation with Baron Rabstein. First of all, of course, I informed him of your proposal concerning the marriage of your son with his daughter Rugena. That he positively refused, saying that the child was already affianced to the son of Heinrich von Rosenberg, and that their betrothal would take place in a few days. Besides that, the young Count would not be acceptable to him as a son-in-law, being light-minded and insolent—in a word, as little agreeable to him as your husband, whose religious and political convictions Count Rabstein does not share. 'Instead of upholding the party of the great barons who seek to protect their rights,' he said, 'Ginek injures us in whatever way he can, and cleaves to Venceslas, having nearly prevented his capture at Beroun.'"

Brancaccio stopped, observing the Countess's agitation, and the red spots which had dawned in her cheeks.

"Forgive me, cousin," he said, "for repeating such discourteous remarks to you, but methinks, that the position of affairs should finally be made clear."

"Of course, of course, go on," she whispered, nervously plucking with her long, bony fingers at the black-and-gold cords which encircled her waist.

"Well then, setting aside the question of marriage. . . . I told the Baron of your financial difficulties arising from the troubled conditions of the times; and in the name of your close relationship begged him to assist you. In this he proved more amenable, although he declared that it would be for the last time, as he had already repeatedly come to the aid of his cousin. He promised to redeem your debt to that impudent burgher of Prague who persecutes you. That, of course, is a valuable concession, but . . . you yourself understand that it is not enough to put you on your feet."

"But, in that case . . . what is to be done?" the Countess whispered irresolutely, gazing beseechingly at him.

A cunning, searching glance flashed upon her for an instant from beneath the Bishop's drooping lids.

"It seems to me . . . the only thing is to . . . revert to the plan we had considered before I went to the Baron," he answered thickly.

The Countess breathed heavily as though she lacked air. Her hand trembled so violently that the handkerchief with which she had been convulsively wiping her forehead nearly dropped from her fingers.

"That *only way* of which you speak is horrible," she muttered in a shaking voice. "But I must sacrifice myself to assure the future of my son," she added suppressing with a violent effort the agitation which had seized her.

"I understand your hesitation, and esteem the pious apprehensions that harass your Christian heart, although you are prompted by maternal love alone," remarked the Bishop; and, raising his eyes to Heaven, he continued, "Yet assuredly the forgiveness of God extends to every sin. Have you forgotten that our holy Mother Church doth welcome the sinner, even as the father his prodigal son, and through the instrumentality of the substitute and earthly representative of Christ enfoldeth him anew in the cloak of innocence?"

Bright color rushed into the pale face of the Countess; and a joyful light glowed in her eyes.

"Is it possible?" she cried, piously clasping her hands. "Will you secure from the Holy Father absolution for the sin I am impelled to commit out of love for my family?"

"Yes, my spiritual daughter and sister! It lies in your power to procure at once that inestimable blessing. My uncle, Cardinal Cossa, hath provided me with several indulgences, and he permits me to dispose of them at my own discretion. But you know that absolution for such a sin as that which you are preparing to commit costs *dear*. Heaven demands a generous reward for its clemency. . . ."

"I know, I know! But what matter? Such a benefit is priceless," she answered joyfully. "I will beg of you a complete indulgence for myself, my husband and son, and pay for it as much as you wish. I would also beseech Your Eminence to grant me a partial indulgence besides, and to allow me to place a certain sum for the poor at your disposal."

A pleasant smile played upon the Bishop's face.

"I fully consent, Cousin Giovanna. And if the Heavens prove as generous to you as you to them there will surely be a special place set aside for you in Paradise. To return, however, to the matter we have in hand. There is no time to be lost! I have not told you yet that I arrived here in company with Baron von Rabstein, who is journeying to Prague on certain of his affairs. We separated at the entrance to the town. I rode here, and he to the hostel of the 'Golden Calf.' We must make haste, for Rabstein proceeds further at dawn."

"Now that my conscience is at rest our project shall not fail for lack of energy. Heaven itself, it seems, favors us, and hath caused the Baron to delay his journey at the 'Golden Calf.' The serving woman at the inn is a . . . penitent . . . and a good friend of my confessor, Father Ilarius. She is blindly obedient to him. She will serve the Baron a meal according to his deserts. But are you sure that the means you have provided will act as we desire?"

"Have no fear as to that. My methods are sure. And in the meantime warn Father Ilarius not to leave

the house, but to await my treasurer, Father Bonaventura, who will give him the medicine, and the necessary instructions." Bending toward the Countess, he whispered:

"Rest assured. If he leaves the town to-morrow he will fall ill upon the road, and that will be still more opportune; for then they will apply to us for medical help, and I shall take him under my own care. Everything will be for the best."

The Countess rose hastily, but Brancaccio checked her.

"Stay. Have you said anything to the Count about our plan?"

"No. Ginek might oppose it, or he might simply betray us at one of the King's banquets where they always drink so much," answered the Countess, with some confusion.

"Excellent! Wisdom is not always drawn with wine. Your discretion does you honor, Countess," remarked the prelate with a light laugh. "And when will your husband return?"

"He went on some urgent business, and will not return before the day after to-morrow."

"Better still. We will set him aside, and leave him to peacefully enjoy the rôle of guardian of the beauteous Rugena."

Blessing the Countess, who reverently kissed his hand, the Bishop departed to the rooms prepared for him, and soon after sent for the father treasurer. Later, after a short conversation, Bonaventura, a small Italian monk

with a foxlike face, hastily left the room and went in search of the Countess's confessor, Father Ilarius.

Remaining alone, Brancaccio for a long time paced thoughtfully about the room. Then, sitting down at a table, he began casting up accounts. Evidently he was pleased with the result, for with an air of satisfaction he shut his note book and closed it in his cash-box. Then he called:

"Richiotto!"

A page entered, tastefully attired in a suit of violet-colored velvet, with the Bishop's coat-of-arms embroidered on the breast. He was a beautiful youth, with a smooth, pale face, long black curls floating upon his shoulders, and burning black eyes. His figure was well-built, but slim and graceful, like that of a woman.

"Tell my people that I shall have no further need of them to-night and that they may go to rest. Then come back and undress me."

Richiotto went out, but soon returned again. He undressed his master and handed him a wide, silken cloak; then placed wine and two goblets upon the table. At last, having carefully barred the door, he stood in front of Brancaccio, arms akimbo, and said saucily:

"So, our official service is at an end. What now, Thomasso?"

"Yes, little devil, now my time begins," answered the other, and, drawing the page on to his knee, began to kiss him tenderly.

Filling a goblet of wine he held it to the page's lips for him to sip, and fed him with the sweetmeats lying upon the silver tray. Under the influence of the drink the beautiful page grew more and more merry and garrulous: obscene jests and witticisms poured freely from his lips, and the Bishop did not lag behind. This orgy of two, behind barred doors, was evidently to his taste, and he enjoyed it, being raised to the highest pitch of rapture by the mad tarantella which the so-called Richiotto danced before him in the guise of a heathen goddess. Only some lingering threads of caution prevented the Bishop from accompanying the dance with a disgusting Neapolitan song.

It was already late when the saintly Bishop and his "faithful page" retired to their several rooms, and then they only parted because of a quarrel. Wine and love had inspired audacity.

"What mischief art thou brewing with Father Bonaventura? I'll wager thou art opening the gates of Heaven for somebody again."

"I would counsel thee, my daughter," snarled the Bishop, suddenly sobered, "to look, listen, and judge only in matters which concern mine own service, secret or open. Take care that the doors of Heaven are not opened for thee too. Any wayside convent would take charge of Marguerita Angelli, the runaway nun!" . . .

Marguerita Angelli grew angry. Dealing her spiritual father a sound thump upon the back, she fled into her room.

Next day the Countess and the Bishop were still sitting at dinner, which, according to the custom of that time, was served at midday, when Richiotto announced that one of his people had brought to him a squire, sent to ask medical aid for Baron Rabstein. The Baron, it seemed, had fallen ill upon the road, and was lying at an inn, at about three hours' journey from the town.

The Bishop, surprised and grieved at the news of Baron von Rabstein's illness, summoned the squire. He then questioned him closely, and said that not only would he immediately send his doctor, but would come himself to examine the invalid, and superintend his removal to the town.

The Countess also took a hearty share in the proceedings. She melted in praise of the Christian love and magnanimity of the Bishop, who, forgetting his own fatigue and the suffering caused by his wound, was ready to hasten to the sick bed to sustain the invalid by faith and science.

"I have a comfortable litter which I will place at the sick man's disposal," she added at the conclusion of her speech. "And I gladly offer him hospitality in the name of my husband, who I am sure would have acted in the same manner."

"I recognize your heart of gold in this generous offer, dear cousin," said the Bishop; "and I am sure the Baron will accept your hospitality most gratefully." As he spoke he prepared for immediate departure upon his own pious errand.

II

A MILD, clear summer's evening was falling. The radiant sun was setting, gilding every object with its fiery rays. Two horsemen were jogging along the road to Pilsen.

One of these was a priest, dressed in a black cassock with wide sleeves, and wearing a cloth cap. His thin, pale face, with its sharp-pointed beard, was exceedingly attractive. His forehead was broad, his lips firmly molded. His large, thoughtful eyes looked benignant, but seemed as though they were clouded by some hidden sorrow. They betokened the thinker and idealist, an upright, honest soul, which suffers no tinkering with conscience, though capable of boundless enthusiasm in the cause of faith, love, and truth. Great, though unconscious, simplicity was expressed in his every action.

His companion was an extremely handsome young man, tall, straight, remarkably well made, with hair as black as the raven's wing. His large dark eyes shone with intelligence and strength of will. He was in secular garb—a modish suit of fine brown cloth. A broad black cloak hung from his shoulders, a sword with a steel handle was perceptible at his side, while a dagger was thrust into the front of his belt. He led by the bridle a horse loaded with baggage, and to the saddle of each

rider was attached a traveling-case. They were conversing animatedly.

"So there thou hast, in brief, the principal events of my stay in Oxford," the young man was saying. "When we are in Prague I will tell thee much that is interesting in our spare moments, Master John; but now I am beside myself with joy at having met thee on the high-road so unexpectedly. And indeed thou hast not yet told me whence thou hast come, and whither thou art proceeding."

"I have been to Husenic on a family matter, to arrange an affair of inheritance for my cousin, Katherine. From thence I went to visit some friends and to preach the word of God to some poor folk to whom their pastors bring no joy. Lord God, what infamies I chanced upon! In truth one sometimes involuntarily asks one's self if the time of Antichrist has not already come! But witnessing the profound faith of these poor people, and the fervent joy with which they listen to a sermon in their native tongue, the hope of some better time blossomed in my heart, and with tears I besought God to restore peace to the Church and to regenerate her."

"And every truly Christian heart will say 'Amen' to such a prayer. Let us hope that God in His mercy will not forget his faithful Bohemian people, and will free them from the German locusts who plunder, oppress and deprave them. From whom, if not from them, comes all this evil, all the misfortunes and the dissensions?"

"Grow not heated, Jerome. It is certain that these

foreigners inflict many evils upon us; but we also have deserved chastisement for our sins."

"Could there be any punishment greater than the presence of these sharpers?" cried Jerome angrily. "Is there any limit to their insolence and greed? When they are beaten on the battlefield they return in the guise of colonists. They gather all the land, all the offices and privileges into their hands. They work their will in the university, and sooner or later they'll drive us from it altogether, if a check be not put upon them in time. We Bohemians are strangers in our fatherland! We work, and they direct! We sow, and they reap! They would deprive us of our language, even!"

At these words the face of the priest flushed slightly. He drew his brows together and his clear eyes expressed discontent.

"Thou speakest truly, Jerome, and all this is mortifying. Though it is sinful, one is often indignant at the injuries done to our people in the university alone. Strife between the professors, and disputes between the German and Bohemian students have become customary; and the rector is always on the side of his Germans."

They were silent, both absorbed in thoughts of their unhappy people. For at the end of the Fourteenth Century most of the Bohemian towns were in the hands of German burghers who had grown fat and rich at the direct expense of the native inhabitants, thanks to the many privileges by which the kings of Bohemia had sought to attract them to the country. Recently, how-

ever, there had occurred certain changes which were not to the advantage of the Germans. The Bohemian town populations had grown considerably, many Bohemian nobles had built or purchased houses for themselves in the towns, and a rivalry had sprung up between the two races which increased with passing years.

The handsome rider whom his companion had called Jerome was the first to speak again.

"Shall we not find some inn upon this road, Master John? We have ridden a goodly stretch, and I am beginning to feel the need of food and rest. It seems to me that I remember an inn not far away from here."

"Some drunken soldiers set fire to it last year, and it was burnt to ashes. No, it is far to an inn. But there is a village close at hand, and we can find shelter in the house of the priest, who has been away for a year, according to the woman left in charge of the house. There we can take our rest."

"And whither has this pious shepherd of the Church gone a-roving?" asked Jerome, laughing.

"Why, he has two parishes, and when he is not in one he represents himself to be in the other, so that it is difficult to verify his words. Though he is remarkably punctual in the gathering of his tithes, they say."

"Ah, he is sure to be exacting at that harvest, especially if he is a German."

"I don't know what he is. It seems he was the youngest of his family and was ordained a priest when scarce seven years of age."

"If his parents were provident, it probably cost them dear. The bishop's charge for a parish is considerable—he has to pay for his own place. In truth, all priests share with Rome—that is, I should say, with the Pope, or better still, *the popes*. That may serve as some excuse for the parish priests."

"Yes, simony like leprosy is gnawing at the Church."

"The Archbishop of Prague, for instance, with his herald, his chamberlain, his chancellor, his marshal, his treasurer, and whatnot, who has three thousand marks of income—not counting the poll-tax, the fruits of forced labor, the sale of benefices and absolutions, and other profits. He little resembles his Heavenly Teacher," remarked Jerome, and suddenly burst into laughter.

"Why dost thou laugh? Can the mournful subjects of our conversation lead to mirth?"

"Pardon my laughter, it was involuntary, dear Master John. I suddenly remembered the ridiculous story of Nicholas Poukhnika, the worthy Canon of Prague, of Tchernina, and Olumutzka, Prior of SS. Nicholas and Jemnitza of Moravia, famed for his niggardliness."

A smile appeared also upon the face of the priest.

"Ah, yes! The King jokingly said he might take away with him from the palace as much money as he could carry, and Nicholas so loaded his pockets and boots that he was unable to move. A sad and absurd incident!"

"But the best part of the story was the end, when the King, breaking into a mad fit of laughter, ordered that all the gold should be taken from him, and he himself driven

away. The King is sometimes seized with such stupendous ideas, and in truth I love him. Notwithstanding his weakness he is well-disposed towards the Bohemians. But look, it seems we have arrived. There on the right are some miserable hovels. That must be the village of which thou didst speak; and, on the road next to the church, I can see a stone building. That must be the priest's dwelling."

"Yes, yes," said his companion, turning into a pathway that led to the village.

A high, solid stone wall surrounded the house. The gate was wide open, and in the courtyard, attached to a trough filled with hay, were twenty saddle-horses. Several packs of hounds lay around, and in a covered wagon could be seen a couple of dead stags and a boar.

"Some hunting-party has reached the house before us. Thou seest the window is lighted, and, judging from the noise, the feast must be at its height. We must turn back," said Hus, not without some regret.

"Indeed we will not! Where there is enough for twenty there is enough for two, and I am faint with hunger. Descend, Father John, and let us ask the hunters to entertain us. They must be some nobles of these parts," said Jerome, nimbly springing from his horse.

The priest alighted also, and tethering their horses they went towards the house, from which there issued a confused clamor of voices, laughter, and singing.

Just as they were ascending the stone steps the door was flung suddenly open. Upon the threshold appeared

a corpulent monk with a lantern in his hand. He had a greasy-red face and round blinking eyes. Beneath his dark cassock, which was tucked up inside the rope serving him as a girdle, were seen his swollen feet in sandals to which big spurs were fastened with straps.

He was evidently drunk, and swayed backwards and forwards, supporting himself by the door-post to keep from falling. The lantern in his hand dangled from side to side. Wine had been spilt over his cassock, and there were spots of grease upon it.

"See, here, the Lord has sent more guests to us—a brother, even," he drawled with a faltering voice, and broke into tipsy laughter. "*Salve, salve!* Enter, my Father, and you, honored guest. There is room for all, and we will find something to eat for our friends."

He lurched aside to let them enter, and our two travelers, with irrepressible disgust, stepped into the passage which led into a large room.

In the doorway they stopped short, astounded. In the center of the room was a large table, spread with wine and eatables. By then the guests had finished eating. They had pushed plates and dishes to the end of the table, and were playing at dice. Little piles of gold, silver, and copper coins were scattered about.

It was an amazing assembly. There were monks and, apparently, priests—judging from their tonsures which alone suggested a spiritual calling—a few knights, and several women. Among the latter were three nuns, whose disordered dress and wanton attitudes betrayed how low

they had fallen. At the middle of the table was sitting a man, still young, not more than thirty-five, but completely bald. His worn and wrinkled face spoke of a wild, dissolute life. On his knees lolled a gipsy in a many-colored petticoat, with bare arms and a mane of black hair hanging about her shoulders.

At that very moment she had raised the horn and was casting the dice upon the table with a loud laugh. At the appearance of the strangers the uproar in the room suddenly died away.

"Look, Berthold is bringing us reenforcements! A doughty warrior, and one of our own fraternity—a rake, like us!" cried the man sitting at the middle of the table. "Ditrich von Stern, the master of these premises, the pious shepherd of this miserable parish, invites you to his modest repast. Thou, my worthy knight, mayest dispose of thyself as it best please thee. Thou, brother of the cassock, shalt sit there, near Zdenko, who speedily will disappear beneath the table and leave thee as a heritage our beauteous sister Bertha."

Jerome was silent, apprehensively smoothing his black beard. The pale face of Hus turned livid. His eyes blazed with wrath. Striding to the table he struck it with his fist, a blow which made the crockery rattle.

"Miscreant! befouling the priestly vestments thou wearest!" he shouted vehemently. "Art thou not ashamed of thine obscenities? Art thou not ashamed to hold that harlot on thy knees, to surround thyself with all this bestial rabble? Reflect, thou betrayer of the

priestly vow! Thou dost wallow in thy drunkenness like the vilest soldier; thou dost turn thy dwelling into a tavern, into a den of infamy!"

Ditrich von Stern listened to this harsh and unexpected harangue, gazing blankly at the speaker, his mouth wide-open with astonishment. But his petrification suddenly changed into an outburst of fury.

"Ha! dost thou venture to speak so to me, thou scurvy street-babbler? I'll teach thee to affront me in mine own house!" he roared, trying to rise, and pushing away the gipsy, who, with a shriek, slipped down upon the ground.

With difficulty he got upon his feet and endeavored to pull from its sheath a hunting-knife which hung at his side.

"I will slit thy tongue! 'Twill teach thee to sermonize Ditrich von Stern as though he were a shoemaker!" he continued, staggering towards Hus with the knife uplifted in his hand.

At this moment one of the tipsy monks seized an earthenware pot from the table and hurled it straight at Hus. It missed its mark, and was shivered to atoms on the doorpost, an inch or so behind the head of Jerome, who, drawing his sword, leapt with one bound in front of Hus, protecting him.

"When thou comest to thy senses, most reverend Father Ditrich, take to heart the truth thou hast heard. A tussle with me might end sadly for thy worthy friends," he shouted scornfully. "Come, Master John, let us leave this sty!"

"Yes, let us shake its dust from our feet. A crust of bread beneath this roof would poison any man," said Hus, in a voice trembling with agitation.

Taking no notice of the oaths and execrations hurled in their wake they left the room, and in the passage nearly stumbled over the prostrate body of Father Berthold, who lay stretched upon the ground, bitterly sobbing, beating his breast, and lamenting:

"*Mea culpa! Mea culpa!* I have sinned against thee, my Heavenly Father!"

With the greatest aversion they stepped across the drunkard, hastily mounted their horses, and rode out of the courtyard. From the house came the sound of a horrible din, with which the shrieks of women mingled.

For some moments they rode on silently.

"There we have seen a speaking picture of what is becoming of the Church," said Jerome, slackening his pace, "though as regards Ditrich nothing is surprising. Three years ago in Prague I witnessed a scene of abomination which clearly showed of what he is capable. You know I dwelt then with my aunt, in the Mala Strana, and once I was returning home in the evening with Master Yakubek when, in front of us, we heard cries, laughter, and hooting from a crowd of people, artisans, boys, and such like. We hastened our steps to see what had occurred, and there before us was a tipsy man with a tonsured head—he had a good deal of hair at that time—perfectly naked, proceeding in a zig-zag. The people were mocking, and throwing mud at him, and he retorted

by spitting at them and pouring forth choice oaths. They would certainly have thrashed him soundly, had he not found refuge in the gateway of some house where he remained hidden. Yakubek, who could not contain himself for wrath, at once set inquiries afoot, and we learned that the name of this rascal was Ditrich von Stern, and that he was a priest who had traveled to Prague, seeking to become a canon. Meanwhile he diverted himself in pot-houses, and the vilest haunts, being an impassioned gambler. That day luck had forsaken him, and he had gambled everything away, even to his shirt, and was returning naked to the Vysehrad, where his mistress dwelt. Yakubek presently uttered a thunder-like denunciation, but the Archbishop hushed up the matter, ordering Ditrich to quit the town forthwith. Nevertheless he was not made canon."

"Well, thou hast seen a drunken priest stark naked in the street, and I not long since beheld one who refused to bury the poor until he had received payment therefor. Which of these is worse I know not," said Hus, bitterly.

"Thanks to this accursed Ditrich we are again upon the high-road, and like to pass the night there."

"Nay, I hope that we may soon find shelter. Methinks, not far from here must stand the castle of Baron Rabstein, with whom I became acquainted in Prague," said Hus to comfort him. "The Baron entertained me with great benevolence, and I even made fast friends with his daughter, the little Rugena. We shall be honorably received beneath his hospitable roof."

III

It was already quite dark when the travelers at last reached Rabstein Castle—an imposing feudal fortress—and knocked at the gate. On learning the names of the new-comers the old castellan hastened to admit them, notwithstanding the absence of the master and the lateness of the hour.

They were first conducted to the dining-hall, and meanwhile two sleeping apartments were prepared for them. While they were being served with supper the castellan related how, ten days before, the Baron had gone to Prague, and how, that day, a journeying pedlar had brought the news that he had fallen ill upon the road and had been removed to Pilsen by a Bishop of his acquaintance.

"Perhaps it is untrue; yet nevertheless the news of the Baron's illness hath alarmed us all," said the faithful servant, with tears in his eyes.

At that moment the door suddenly flew open and a little girl, followed by an elderly woman in a white hood, ran into the room. She was a charming child, tall for her nine years. There was fairy-like lightness in her slim, graceful figure. Her pretty little face was thin, and of a clear paleness. Her large blue eyes, so dark as

to appear almost black, looked gravely out from between thick, curling lashes.

Breaking away from the nurse who sought to restrain her, the child ran straight to Hus, not noticing Jerome.

"Hast thou brought news of my father, Master John? Is he better?" she asked in a frightened voice. "The pedlar said that he was very ill, and that they were carrying him in a litter."

Hus tenderly took the child's cold little hands within his own.

"Dear Rugena, I have not come from Pilsen. I am but going there now, and I know nothing of thy father's illness. Have no fear, but trust in the Heavenly mercy."

Rugena lifted to him her beautiful eyes, filled with tears.

"Thou dost not think that God will let my father die, thus leaving me alone?" . . .

Sobs choked her voice.

Touched by the grief of the child, Hus drew her to him, and tried to comfort her.

The deep, mild voice and fascinating personality of the young preacher produced a beneficial effect upon the child. Rugena's sorrowful face grew brighter. She meekly folded her hands and laid her little curly head trustingly on the consoler's shoulder. Then she remarked the presence of Jerome, and gave him a friendly greeting.

Rejoiced at the calming influence of his words, Hus

persuaded Rugena to go back to bed, and she was preparing to obey him when suddenly muffled sounds arose in the corridor without.

Hasty steps were heard, cries and lamentations; then, at last the door opened and on the threshold appeared an old armor-bearer, pale and covered with dust. Behind him followed the castellan, with tears running down his distraught face.

"Alas, reverend Master John," said the castellan in a shaking voice, "what terrible woe has befallen us! Our beloved lord is dead!"

On seeing the Baron's armor-bearer Rugena ran towards him, but his mournful and exhausted aspect terrified her, and she stopped and stood as though rooted to the spot. Then, at the castellan's words, she gave a dull cry and helplessly threw up her arms. Her head fell back, and she would have fallen to the floor had not the nurse caught her in time.

Those present hastened to her aid; but Rugena was insensible, and she was carried away without recovering consciousness.

Hus, profoundly affected by this tragic circumstance, begged the armor-bearer Matthias to go with him, and to relate in full the details of the untimely death of the Baron, whose splendid physique and perfect health had promised him still many years of life.

Matthias minutely described the circumstances of his master's death, with difficulty restraining his sobs.

Upon hearing Brancaccio's name, Jerome started.

"What! Brancaccio, the nephew of Baldassare Cossa, connected with this misfortune! Oh, then. . . ."

A disapproving glance from Hus restrained him, and he resumed more quietly:

"I know the Bishop; but his presence here astonished me. I thought he was in Italy."

A bitter smile appeared for an instant upon the armor-bearer's lips, but he continued his story, and at the end asked permission to depart.

"What didst thou wish to say by thine uncautious exclamation concerning Brancaccio?" asked Hus, when they remained alone.

"I could not restrain myself! The thought entered my head that the sudden illness and death of the Baron were unnatural and the Bishop's solicitous attentions to the sick man—suspicious! When I was in Italy I heard stories about Cossa—he was then Archbishop Ankonsky—incredible stories that set the hair on end. It was said that he had been a pirate and had forsaken that calling to become a chief of Italian mercenaries. I don't know why he deserted and assumed the cassock, but it is certain that it does not hinder him from continuing his former occupations—brigandage and depredation. The nephew of this cut-throat, they say, is the right hand of his uncle, and is it likely he would take the trouble to visit Bohemian nobles if he were not certain of some rich booty? It is strange that Waldstein is appointed executor, the more strange as it is well known that he and the late Baron were political antagonists. Rabstein, as you

know, is a fervent adherent to the 'Union of Bohemian Nobles,' and aided Rosenberg to seize the King at Beroun, while Ginek Waldstein is an influential member of that band of court menials who surround the King. That is enough to uphold my suspicions."

"May the mercy of Gōd protect the innocent orphan amid all these abominations!" whispered Hus, crossing himself.

Then, sinking to his knees, he said his evening prayer, and retired to rest, as he was nearly dropping with fatigue.

On leaving the guests' apartments Matthias was obliged to repeat in the servants' quarters the whole story of the Baron's death; and afterwards the castellan spoke with him for a long time. Free at last, he hastened to the apartments of Rugena, and notwithstanding the lateness of the hour knocked lightly at a door next to that of the child's bedroom.

It was opened at once.

"I thought thou wouldst come, Matthias, and was awaiting thee," whispered the nurse.

"I wished to speak with thee of the calamity which has befallen us. How fares our luckless little mistress?"

"The angel sleeps. Her grief and tears exhausted her at last. When I carried her here I feared at first that she would lose her reason; but afterwards she grew calmer and fell asleep upon my knee."

Matthias went into the room and sat down at the table, upon which an oil lamp was burning.

Itka and Matthias were cousins and had been friends from childhood. They were both born and brought up in the castle, and their lives had been passed in the service of the Rabsteins, to whom they were devoted. The deceased Baron Svietomir knew and valued their fidelity, and had distinguished them by his trust in a manner amounting almost to friendship.

Silence fell in the room. Itka wept softly, while Matthias sat with his elbows upon the table, gloomily frowning.

"Now, tell me how our beloved master died. I cannot understand from whence he caught this illness. When he left us he was as sound as a fish in the water."

"For that reason I am convinced that the Baron fell the victim of a dastardly crime," whispered Matthias, bending towards the nurse, who was electrified by his words.

"Infamy! . . . Infamy! . . ." she murmured with trembling lips. "But who could have killed him, so kind and generous as he was? To whose profit could it have been?"

"Oh, the profit is clear enough. Listen, and I will tell thee everything because I can rely upon thy silence, and then thou canst judge thyself whether my suspicions are well founded. Thou rememberest how displeased I was at the unexpected arrival of the Italian Bishop. I have no faith in these false, cunning, insinuating foreigners: they creep up to you like a dog in order to bite. So on the eve of our departure, while undressing my master, I

tried skilfully to learn from him why the Italian had come. But the master was clever. He at once understood my intention, and laughed. He clapped me upon the back, and said, 'Know then, old fox, that the Bishop came to me as an emissary from my cousin, Ginek, to wheedle me out of my money, and to propose that I should give my daughter to Ginek's son, Vok. But I have no intention either of ruining myself for the Waldsteins or of bestowing my daughter upon their feather-brained son, and so I told him. He undertook the negotiations because he is a relation of the Countess herself. So, now, go, and sleep peacefully. . . . Until we reached Pilsen the master was in excellent health and the disorder seized him after he had supped in the 'Golden Calf.' When we set forth again at dawn next day I noticed that the Baron was ailing and could scarce retain his seat upon the saddle; and when we reached the first inn he fell senseless. I forthwith despatched one of our people to the town for a physician. The Baron recognized nobody and seemed to burn as though on fire. With the physician came the Bishop himself and his treasurer. Our master was placed within the litter and carried to the town, to the house of the Count Waldstein. All this I deemed suspicious. I mistrust the Bishop since I perceived that one of his pages is—a woman in disguise."

"What shamelessness!"

"Yes, yes. Thou canst understand, Itka, that this discovery did not lead me to respect him. And when

that night the villain dismissed us all, saying that he himself would tend the Baron, I was seized with such despair that I could not close my eyes. Hearing steps and spoken words in my master's room I crept into a kind of storeroom adjoining it, and listened. They spoke softly, but I could discern that our master was dictating his will, which the Bishop presently read out aloud. All I could not hear, but I remember well that Rugena was committed to the guardianship of Rosenberg who should bring her up until her marriage. Thou canst imagine what I felt when that evening, the body of our master having been placed within the coffin and borne to the church, Count Waldstein assembled us all and read to us a will by which he was appointed Rugena's guardian and entrusted with her property until her marriage with Vok, his son; the betrothal to take place speedily according to the desire of our master."

"Why, that is brazen deceit. The will is false. We must disclose the treachery, and make complaint."

"Complaint?" he answered, smiling bitterly. "Complaint to whom? Who will believe the accusation of a sorry fellow such as I? All would call it libel. No, Itka. Some time later perhaps we will disclose the truth to the child herself, but now we must needs be silent. I grieve that they will straightway begin to plunder our lord's possessions, and in his coffer are great sums of money, and our lady's diamonds are kept there too. They are great wealth in themselves."

"Shall we not conceal them in some secret corner of

the tower? Count Waldstein has not set foot within the castle, and he would never find them."

"A good thought! I have the key of the coffer. I hid it straightway when I saw the Bishop accompanying the litter. To-morrow night we will contrive it!"

Before they parted these two honest servants had arranged all the details of their plan.

Before leaving the castle next day Hus and Jerome asked to see Rugena that they might express their sympathy to her and bid her farewell.

The sight of the pale child, who seemed to have wasted away during the night, moved them to the bottom of their hearts. With tears in his eyes Hus drew Rugena towards him, kissed her little head, and blessed her. He talked to her for a long time, trying to awaken in her despairing heart submission to the will of God, and to convince her that she would not be separated for ever from her father, but would see him again in the future life if she had deserved it by piety and virtue. Her father, he said, would be her advocate in Heaven, before the throne of God Almighty.

The ardent faith by which Hus was inspired, and which never deserted him, sustaining him even in the hour of death, acted like balm upon the pure, impressionable soul of the child. Her anguish was by degrees replaced by a deep though tranquil sorrow, while a rush of tears relieved her heart. She looked lovingly and trustingly into the clear, sad eyes of her consoler, and whispered, clasping her arms about his neck:

"Thou art kind, Master John; and I love thee. Stay with me."

"Gladly would I stay, my child; but duty summons me to Prague. But I will pray for thee every day, and for thy father. God grant we soon may meet again!"

"And I too, as thou hast told me, will pray God morning and evening, thinking of my father and looking at Heaven where he is gone. He will know that I am always thinking of him."

That night Itka and Matthias crept to the room of their late master, and the armor-bearer opened a great iron coffer chained against the wall. From this coffer they hastily removed two large, heavy boxes, and several sacks of gold. They locked the coffer again and carried the objects they had taken from it into the so-called library, where a mass of ancient parchments and family documents were preserved. A part of the wall, hung with shelves, moved aside at pressure upon a spring, and disclosed an entrance into a rather large room, from which a secret passage led out into the wood.

"Here it will all lie safe, until Rugena comes of age, and her mother's diamonds will not pass into the pockets of that Italian knave," said Matthias, contentedly. "And you, Itka, in case of our death, must tell the child where her goods lie hid. She must herself give the key of the coffer to Count Waldstein. He must have no suspicion that the diamonds have passed through our hands."

The next day Itka spoke much to Rugena about her future guardians, and expressed her suspicions as to their greed, thus skilfully giving the child to understand the necessity for concealing part of her property to prevent others from depriving her of it.

Rugena was not only older than her years, but she possessed, too, that intelligent observation which develops early in solitary children, brought up entirely among older persons. In a trice she realized that her guardians were—enemies, not to be trusted, and said, without hesitation:

"Let us hide the most valuable things!"

Then Itka showed her the secret room, and everything that she and Matthias had hidden there; and finally gave her the key of the coffer.

"Rest assured," said the child firmly, "I will betray nothing, and I will not give up my mother's things. And I will give Count Waldstein the key in such a manner that not the slightest suspicion shall fall upon Matthias."

And her pretty face expressed such sagacity and determination as she spoke, that the nurse was positively amazed.

A few days later the Count arrived with the body at Rabstein Castle in order that the dead man might be buried in the family vault; and upon the following morning all the inhabitants of the castle were summoned to the great hall by order of the Count. He himself read the Baron's will appointing him Rugena's guardian and entrusting him with all her property until her marriage

with Vok von Waldstein, designated her bridegroom. Finally the Count declared that, after having completed the inventory of the property and acquainted himself with the position of affairs, he would take his ward back with him to his house, where she would be educated.

On that same day Waldstein energetically applied himself to work, and the absence of the keys of the coffer at once became apparent. He carefully questioned all the servants, who of course knew nothing. After some consideration the Count bethought himself to inquire of Rugena whether she knew by chance where the key had been kept.

"Yes, I know where it is; but my father strictly forbade me to tell anybody whatsoever," the child answered firmly. Mindful of what she had been told, she continued to regard the Count with an air of reserve and distrust; and it was not until Waldstein had been at some pains to convince her that he now represented her father that Rugena finally yielded to his persuasions. Demanding, therefore, that everybody, even Itka, should be sent from the room, she led her guardian into her father's apartments and drew the key out of a secret hiding-place.

When, two days later, the Count asked Rugena whether she knew the whereabouts of her mother's jewels, she expressed complete ignorance, and maintained her ground so firmly that at length he believed her. This inspired Itka and Matthias with an almost awe-struck respect for the child's intelligence.

Their departure was fixed for a week later. Wald-

stein, desiring to be on good terms with his future daughter-in-law, asked her what she would like to take with her.

"Will you permit me to take anything I wish?" she inquired.

"Yes, my child, if only thou dost not ask to take the castle or one of its towers, which would be difficult," he laughed.

"Then let me keep my nurse and Matthias with me to wait upon me, and Perouna, my father's favorite hunting-dog."

"To that I agree, the more willingly as I had thought of it myself."

On the appointed day, Rugena, sitting with Itka in the litter, with Perouna at her feet, quitted the home of her ancestors, under the protection of Matthias, who rode on horseback by their side. With eyes wet with tears, and a face serious beyond her years, she bade farewell to her father's castle; and when at a turn in the road it was hidden from her sight she burst into sobs and hid her face against the shoulder of her faithful nurse.

IV

It was seven o'clock in the evening, and the inhabitants of Waldstein Castle were preparing to sit down to supper. In the great dining-hall, ornamented with dark oak carvings, the table was spread, covered with sumptuous plate and Venetian crystal. The Countess, accompanied by Bishop Brancaccio and Father Bonaventura, came in and sat down at the table. The pages began to wait upon them.

The Countess was evidently displeased at something.

"I cannot understand Vok's absence. He should have been here half an hour ago. It is a most impermissible lack of attention on his part," she said in an angry voice.

At that moment the sound of footsteps was heard in the room adjoining, and in the doorway appeared a youth of about sixteen, who bore a strong resemblance to the Countess.

Young Count Waldstein was a very handsome boy, tall, and beautifully made, looking much older than his years. His slightly sun-burned face was expressive of daring, even of arrogance. The large black eyes which he had inherited from his mother shone with pride and betrayed a passionate soul.

Going to his mother he kissed her hand and asked her pardon for his lateness.

The love and pride with which the Countess followed every movement of her son showed clearly that she idolized him. He sat down and began to eat, but suddenly with a frown glanced round the table.

"Where is Svietomir?" he inquired.

"Where should the glutton be? Doing penance of course," said the Countess, disdainfully; and turning to Brancaccio she added, "I cannot express the grief that worthless boy occasions me. It is really a punishment for our good Father Ilarius to teach him Latin and the Sciences. He is so lazy that he will not even learn the psalms by heart!"

"What crime hath he committed to-day?"

"Father Ilarius caught him eating ham, and it is a fast-day! And he lied besides, saying that the steward's wife had given it to him."

"Ah, that was, in truth, a monstrous crime. And where is the revered father himself? Exhorting the criminal, treating him to admonitions instead of supper, and setting him a good example of fasting and restraint?" asked Vok, slyly.

The Countess was indignant.

"Vok!" she said angrily. "You are again permitting yourself the use of unseemly jests. You forget in whose presence you are. It is your duty to respect my confessor. Know, then, that our good Father Ilarius is visiting the sick."

Vok answered nothing, but smiled maliciously. Brancaccio, who had been closely observing him, in order to

avert the threatening storm, began to speak of other matters. In especial he referred to the fact that, from news received that morning, they expected the Count to arrive at the castle with Rugena in two days' time. The conversation then turned upon Baron Rabstein, and the part he had played in the union of nobles, with Rosenberg, Gradetsky, Landstein, and others. At length they arose from the table.

Letting his mother and the Bishop pass before him Vok lingered by the door, and, summoning one of the pages by a gesture, whispered something into his ear. The boy nodded to show that he had understood, and ran to do his bidding.

A few minutes later he returned with a basket in his hands, and began to fill it with food that had been left upon the table: fish, roast meat, cakes and fruit.

"Bogumil! Thou good-for-nothing rascal! How darest thou steal from off the table? Put it all back, or I will pull thine ears!" cried the steward angrily, and seized him by the collar.

But the boy slipped through his hands like an eel.

"Count Vok has ordered it to be taken to his room to feed the dogs with. Go thyself and ask him!" the boy answered saucily, and disappeared through the door snatching up a piece of cheese as he passed the sideboard.

"What foolishness—feeding dogs on pike and cakes and fruit," grumbled the steward angrily. He had been counting upon the dainties for himself.

Saying that he was tired after the long journey on

horseback, Vok took leave of his mother and the Bishop and retired to his apartments.

His two rooms were furnished with all the luxuries available in those times. It was nearly dark already, and little light penetrated through the narrow window set in the thick wall. A servant lit a wax candle in a copper candlestick.

Little Bogumil was meanwhile laying the table with the provisions he had brought. Vok, presenting him a cake as a reward, bade him retire, saying that he was not to be disturbed without some pressing cause. Then, after thinking awhile, Vok rose and went into the corridor, at the end of which was a closed door. Vainly he tried to open it; and at last he thumped upon it with his fists, crying:

"Svietomir, thou silly boy! What, art thou asleep or dead from hunger? Open the door!"

"I've been locked in since morning, Vok; and I can neither come out nor open to thee," said a weak, childish, tearful voice from within the room.

A look of pity and disdain appeared upon young Waldstein's expressive face.

"Well, then, open the window at least, and wait for me. I will come to thee," he said, and went back along the corridor.

He hastened down the winding staircase into the garden at the foot of the castle, and went towards the tower, at the top of which, through an open window, a childish figure could be dimly distinguished in the dusk.

"I am here, Vok; but how canst thou get me down from such a height?" said the little voice, anxiously.

"Look now! Is that high? If I had been in thy place I had been free long ago, if only to pull the nose of that shorn devil who torments thee. Thou art but a wet chicken! Look, I will show thee the way."

A thick creeper covered the tower with its dark green leaves. Making use of its mighty branches, Vok with daring agility quickly gained the window, which indeed was not very far from the ground.

He clambered into the round room whose bare walls and scanty furniture presented a striking contrast to the comfort and elegance of his own apartment. The twinkling light of the oil lamp before the holy statue revealed a simple bed, a table, a few wooden benches, and a reading-desk in the corner. On the table near a pile of books lay a jug of water and some crusts of bread.

"Here am I! And it is not harder to get down than to come up!" said Vok, laughing contentedly. "Wouldst thou prefer to stick here and await the coming of the doughty Ilarius, or to come down into my room, to sup bravely and receive a present? Choose!"

"Of course I would rather go to supper! I am so hungry. But I do not know whether I can climb down like thee."

"Bah! Necessity gives birth to heroes! I will put thee through the window, and thou must climb courageously. See that great branch; it is like a step. Hold

the bar with thy hands and do not let thyself go till thou standest firm upon it."

He helped Svietomir to climb through the window and did not let go of him until the boy said that he stood firm.

"Courage! Have no fear! Thou weighest no heavier than a hungry cat. I will come down afterwards, so as not to tear the creeper."

The descent was safely accomplished, and in five minutes they were safe in Vok's room. He carefully locked the door.

"Eat, and fortify thy strength!" he said, pointing to the table. "After a holy fast with Father Ilarius thou lookest sickly."

"I thank thee, Vok. In all the house thou alone art kind and pitiful to me," answered the famished child, sitting at the table and proceeding to fill his mouth with the good things prepared for him.

Now, in the lighted room, it was possible to judge of Svietomir's appearance. He was a thin boy of about thirteen, with long, fair, wavy hair and big, clear, grayish-green eyes. His thin, pleasant little face looked transparent, like wax. There was a sad, shy smile on his pale lips. The shabby old coat he wore, which was far too wide for him, could not conceal the native elegance of his childish figure, as graceful as that of a girl.

When at length the meal was finished to the last crumb Svietomir ran to wash his face and hands. Then he sat down at Vok's side and gazed at him in silence.

"Ah, how well I have supped!" he said, with a satisfied sigh. "And how thankful I am to thee, Vok, for thy kindness to me."

"Poor little goose!" said the other with feeling, tenderly stroking his curly head. "Why art thou silent before that wretch who uses thee so vilely?"

"But how should I oppose him? He is stronger than I, and my aunt is always on his side. It is now four days since he returned, and he hath already beaten me thrice. And not once have I dined or supped, because he says a future priest must accustom himself to fasting and mortification of the flesh, and not glut his stomach. Only to-day, because of that unlucky piece of ham, he flogged me till the blood ran, and said I should be locked up for a week."

The boy was silent because of the tears that choked his voice.

"Scoundrel!" muttered Vok, through his teeth.

"Yes, he is a bad man, and I hate him—as indeed I hate all priests. I will sooner drown myself than be a priest," said Svietomir, energetically clenching his fists, while his eyes flashed beneath their long lashes.

"Ah, at last! That is how I like to see thee. And now I will give thee the present I promised thee."

The young Count produced a sheet of parchment from beneath his tunic and spread it out upon the table.

"Look, Svietomir! Here is an indulgence for all sins of the flesh, properly signed by the Archbishop of Prague. The name of its possessor is not written yet, and I am

going to write it now: Svietomir Kryshanov. After that thou canst eat ham under the very nose of Ilarius, and he will not dare to chide thee for it. Even though thou shouldest pummel him with thy fists, the gates of Heaven will still be open to thee!" Vok said, laughing.

Svietomir ran into the adjoining room to fetch ink and a pen.

"Where didst thou find such a treasure?" he asked joyfully while Vok was writing on the parchment.

"I bought it of a begging monk who was tumbling drunk about the high-road. He must have stolen it from somewhere, because he sold it me so cheap—for one gold piece. But that does not deprive it of any of its value as a key to the gates of Heaven. Ah! Father Ilarius has returned, it seems, from his charitable mission."

And indeed in the corridor was heard the sound of quick though heavy footsteps. Svietomir trembled and turned pale.

"What will he say now when he does not find me in the room?" he whispered, terror in his voice.

"Ah, we will see! I will have an explanation with him here, and try to cure him of his passion for making thee a saint," saik Vok, throwing the door wide open. At the end of the corridor could be seen—purple with rage—the face of Father Ilarius.

"If you are seeking Svietomir, most reverend Father, he is here with me," cried Vok, beckoning him to enter.

"So you are hiding him? Wait, thou abandoned boy! I will deal with thee afterwards for thy knavery," said

the priest, turning with a threatening look to Svietomir, who was huddling against the table half dead with terror.

"Pardon me, most reverend Father! I wish that your reckoning with Svietomir should take place now, in my presence; the more so since I myself went to fetch him and brought him here. You should be ashamed to act so inhumanly towards a child who has nobody to protect him."

"Insolent youth, do you dare preach me a sermon? I will complain to your mother of your want of respect; and as to this worthless boy, committed to my care, I will reduce him properly by abstinence and fasting. I will make him a fitting servant of God's altar," wrathfully hissed the priest.

Vok turned pale, and grasping the handle of his dagger advanced towards him with a threatening face.

"Before making Svietomir a worthy servant of the Lord see that you are one yourself. Cease this mockery with the child. You do but accustom him to lies and hypocrisy. And I would have you aware, most reverend Ilarius Schwarz, that I know well the object of your charitable visits: it is none other than the daughter of the charcoal-dealer, Michael, whom you seduced last spring, forcing her and her father to keep silence for fear he lose his place. If I tell that to my father there will be much unpleasantness for you. He would not be best pleased that my mother's confessors should so disport themselves upon his lands. Be contented with your salutary influence upon the Countess, my mother, who is so blind as not

to note your escapades; and refrain from your iniquitous behavior to Svietomir, who, by the way, is now possessed of an indulgence freeing him from the obligation of observing fasts," Vok concluded derisively, pointing to the parchment spread out upon the table.

But the monk vouchsafed it not a glance. Choking with rage he turned and ran out of the room, noisily slamming the door behind him.

"Curse thee! Thou shalt answer to me for this!" he hissed between his teeth, as he swept along the corridor like a hurricane.

The impotent wrath of his mother's confessor threw the young Count into a merry mood. He flung himself, laughing, into an armchair, and only after his first fit of mirth had passed did he turn to Svietomir, who was still standing mournfully by the table.

"Fear not, Svietomir," he said reassuringly. "Thou wilt not be made to answer for this parley. If he beat thee again, complain to me, and I will find the means to muzzle this German dog. To-night thou shalt sleep in my room. We will let the first wrath of this fire-eater die away before thou encounterest him again."

While the servant, at the young Count's command, was preparing a bed for Svietomir, Vok himself ascended the winding staircase to a room in the highest story of the tower in which little Kryshanov was lodged. Here too the furnishing was of the simplest description, but an abundant array of swords, daggers, lances, gauntlets,

cross-bows, and various other implements of warfare gave a martial appearance to the room.

A man of gigantic build was sitting at the table, reading the Bible by the light of an oil lamp. This was Anton Broda—teacher of knightly arts at the castle. Broda enjoyed the respect of the old Count and especially that of Vok, to whom in earlier years he had been nurse, as he had been later his instructor in the science of war.

At the entrance of young Waldstein, Broda rose, but the boy made him a sign to be seated again, and dragging forward a bench sat down at his side.

"Ah, Broda," he said gaily, "I must tell thee what has occurred between Father Ilarius and me. He nearly burst with rage when he discovered that I knew of his intrigue with old Michael's daughter. Thou didst him a sorry turn when thou toldst me of that escapade." And he related his conversation with Svietomir, the purchase of the indulgence, and the collision with the priest. "Thou seest, Anton, that I have kept my word, and taken Svietomir under my protection," concluded the youth with a contented air.

"God will reward thee, sir, for a good deed. And I can ill support the sobs and cries of that unhappy child when the German dog torments him. That such a villain, such a shameless libertine, should wear the priestly cassock!"

"Now he is in my hands. But I would bid thee remember, Broda, that while I have kept my promise thou

hast not yet kept thine. Thou wilt take me to one of the secret meetings of which thou hast spoken?"

Broda leant his elbows on the table and grew thoughtful.

"I have not brought myself to do so yet, Lord Vok, because I am not sure whether thy father would approve. But since thou dost so urgently desire it—let it be so! Why, it is not a sin to gather in our fashion, to pray to God as our fathers prayed, to speak of the misery of our country, which no Bohemian can contemplate without a bleeding heart. So, let us go next Saturday. I know that thou wilt never betray me. . . ."

"That I swear by Christ!"

After some further conversation the young Count went back to his room, and Anton resumed his reading of the Bible.

A strange man was this Broda—reserved, and of a severe and gloomy aspect. All the servants in the castle feared him, yet they loved and respected him because of his justice and integrity. Frequently, too, as they were aware, he used his great influence over the young Count to rescue people from misfortune, or from the wrath of the German manager, a protégé of the Countess.

His life had been stormy and full of adventure.

In those hard times his family had found it difficult to live, since his father, a poor gentleman, possessed but a small estate in the neighborhood of the Kladburg monastery.

The indifference of Squire Nicholas and his family to

the religious observances of the Church caused them to be suspected of belonging to the ancient faith (which had been pronounced heretical in the country), and of secretly receiving communion in both kinds. This suspicion called forth the disfavor of the prior, and it was known that he was hotly desirous of purging the fold of such black sheep who might infect the whole flock.

But in this case it was difficult, as Squire Nicholas kept tight hold of his little piece of land, and was held in high respect by the surrounding peasantry. His weakness, however, was poverty, and in a difficult moment he was forced to borrow money at a high rate of interest from a German townsman. Two years later, while traveling to the town to see his creditor, Squire Nicholas disappeared, entirely without trace. The German presented his claim for payment, and the debt appeared to be of such magnitude that the whole property passed into his hands. The widow, with her two children, Martin and Anton, was thrown into the street. She soon died, carrying with her to the grave the conviction that her husband, who on the day of his disappearance had been carrying with him money for the payment of his debt, had been done to death. This she believed had occurred at the instigation of the creditor himself, in order that he might become possessed of their land, upon which he afterwards settled a nephew of his own.

Alone in the world, without a farthing of money, Martin and Anton, one eighteen years of age and the other sixteen, were forced to adopt roving lives. Anton, who

was distinguished by remarkable beauty and by gigantic strength and stature, became a captain of mercenaries, and fought in many battles, at first in his own country and afterwards even in Italy in the army of the Duke of Mantua. But through all the vicissitudes of his stormy life two feelings were firmly imprinted upon his soul—love for his country and invincible hatred of everything German.

Chance led him to Count Waldstein, who offered him a place in his house as teacher of knightly accomplishments; and as that was an honorable and well-paid position, he gladly accepted the offer. During the Count's long absence in Prague Broda became a constant attendant at the sermons of Mathew of Janov. To him, Germanism and Catholicism were one, and were therefore equally detestable; so that he became a fervent partizan of reform. Old religious memories awoke in him and bound him body and soul to the Greek form of worship practised by his ancestors, adherents to which continued secretly to exist. A few years after entering the service of the Count, Broda saved the life of the five-year-old Vok, who was being nearly gored to death by an infuriated bull, and this feat not only gained him the favor of his employers, but gave rise to a close friendship between the boy and his rescuer.

Vok's fiery and courageous nature was dear to the heart of the old warrior, and the little Count loved his tutor's tales of war and hunting, and his legends of the ancient heroes of Bohemia.

All his bile and savage hatred of everything German, all his scorn for the priesthood in their depravity and blind subservience to the foreigners, Anton poured into the young Count's heart, and their conversations led inevitably to Vok's entering into relations with the adherents of the ancient faith, and his admission to their secret gatherings.

V

At length Count Waldstein arrived with Rugena at the castle. Vok met them in the courtyard, bowed low to his little betrothed, and helped her to alight from the litter. Taking in all the details of Rugena's appearance with one proud glance he appeared satisfied with her and led her to his mother. But Rugena regarded her bridegroom in an unfriendly, almost inimical manner, and tried to withdraw her hand from his. The Countess Waldstein also displeased her excessively, so that after submitting in silence to her kisses and demonstrative embraces Rugena sat stiffly down. The Countess, upon her part, appeared not to notice the cold hostility of her future daughter-in-law, and leading her affectionately to a luxurious chamber set apart for the wealthy heiress, bade her rest until evening.

Half an hour before supper the Countess came to her again, and, bidding Itka accompany them, led Rugena to a large room where were gathered to meet them the Bishop, both Counts—father and son—the two priests, and the principal servants of the castle, with the castellan and Broda at their head. When all were assembled Count Ginek solemnly announced that in conformity with the will of his deceased cousin, which was in complete agreement with his own desires, he further betrothed Rugena Rabstein to Vok, Count Waldstein, his son, and that

the joyful event would be appropriately feasted at the conclusion of the period of mourning for the heavy loss which the family had incurred; while the wedding itself would take place when the bride had accomplished sixteen years of age.

Although Rugena was still a child she instinctively felt the gravity of the moment and turned pale; and when the Count endeavored to join her hand with that of her future bridegroom she tore it away and drew back.

"I don't want to!" she whispered.

"Rugena!" protested the Count in a severe voice, "I did not think that thou wouldst oppose the will of thy dead father! The Lord Bishop there, who assisted at thy father's last moments, can vouch for his desire. His Eminence in the kindness of his heart expressed the wish to bless your betrothal, and now thou art refusing like a capricious, ill-taught little girl!"

Rugena had been trained in a deep respect for the Church and its servants, and had seen Brancaccio in friendly relations with her father when he had last visited the castle. In the face of such an authority her childish obstinacy melted at once. Without further resistance she stretched out her hand to the Bishop, who laid it in that of Vok and placed an emerald ring upon her finger. Her soul was seized with sudden anguish when she lifted her eyes to the face of her betrothed and caught his gloomy, displeased glance. With difficulty she kept back the tears that trembled on her long, thick lashes.

At the supper-table the betrothed couple were placed in seats of honor, and when their health was toasted Brancaccio made a speech setting forth the sanctity of the bonds of love and duty which united them. Rugena, observant and developed beyond her years, observed that the Bishop's words provoked a disdainful smile from Vok, and this want of reverence for the words of an orator of such high dignity surprised and grieved her, so that when at last she went to her room with Itka, who was waiting to undress her, she burst into despairing sobs. From these she did not cease—in spite of the nurse's attempts at consolation—until at last sleep came to relieve her weary body and aching heart.

The next day Rugena was calmer when she awoke. A great box of toys and sweetmeats sent by her betrothed somewhat conciliated her. She was also interested in the unpacking of the various objects brought from her home, and at last she went out into the garden to play with Perouna.

Running with the dog along the shady alleys she remembered her walks with her father, and her gaiety suddenly disappeared. A feeling of loneliness wrung her heart, and the tears gushed from her eyes. With drooping head she sat down upon a bench, while Perouna stretched himself out at her feet.

Suddenly, through her tears, she perceived a boy, with a book in his hands, sitting beneath a tree not far away. He was looking at her with some curiosity. His pale little

face and big sorrowful eyes attracted Rugena, and diverted her sad thoughts.

"Who art thou? What art thou doing here?" she asked, forgetting everything else in her newly awakened interest.

"I am Svietomir," answered the boy hesitatingly; "and I am learning the Latin lesson set me."

"Thy name is Svietomir like my father's?" exclaimed Rugena in astonishment. "Come here quickly, and tell me where thou livest and what thou art."

But the boy did not move.

She ran to him, took his hand, and led him back to her seat.

"How beautiful thou art! Thou must be Vok's betrothed!" said Svietomir, looking at her in delight.

With her big bright eyes and masses of curly golden hair Rugena seemed to him, indeed, like some unearthly vision.

"Yes, but I should like better not to be betrothed to him, he is wicked," she said.

"But that is not true. Vok is good and kind, and he protects me," Svietomir asserted—with such warmth that Rugena was disconcerted.

"But who art thou that thou hast need of protection, and protection from whom?" she asked, half in astonishment and half in scorn.

"I am an orphan. Count Waldstein took me out of charity to educate me. My name is Svietomir Kryshanov."

"Sigismund Kryshanov often came to visit my father in Prague; but he was a rich noble."

"He was my second cousin."

"And why dost thou not live with him?"

"He and his brother were enemies to my father who is dead; but I know not why. And when my father was killed in the last war between the nobles and the King they would not acknowledge me. We had nothing left then. Count Waldstein was my father's friend and took me home with him, and it is now seven years since I came to live here. When I grow up I am to be a priest, though I have no desire at all to be one." And Svietomir sighed deeply.

"If Vok is thy protector he will not let them make thee one by force."

"Oh, he has not so much power! It is his mother who desires that I should be a priest. And when her confessor, Father Ilarius, beats me and starves me with fasts, so that I know not what to do for hunger, Vok feeds me secretly."

"I shall think better of Vok now. But thou shalt no longer hunger. Come to me, and thou shalt have as many dainties as thou canst wish. And I will tell the Countess that thou art my friend and that thy preceptor must set thee free when I desire it, that thou mayest play with me."

The conversation grew still more intimate. The loneliness of their positions as orphans in a strange house drew them to one another. Svietomir was much nearer

to Rugena in years and character than Vok, who was almost a grown youth. They separated with warm affection and a promise to meet and play together as often as possible.

VI

On the Saturday morning Vok begged permission of his father to set forth on a hunting tour which might keep him absent until the evening of the following day. The Count was a passionate hunter himself, and gave his consent the more freely for knowing that with Broda his son would be in safe hands. Having breakfasted heartily and armed themselves thoroughly—not only for the purpose of hunting but for that of self-defense in case of an unexpected attack—they rode out of the courtyard.

They talked together as they rode. Broda related to the young Count how his father had suffered for his attachment to old customs, and how, in his youth, in the time of King John, he had heard John of Moravia preach.

Towards evening they entered a thick wood in a hilly party of the country, intersected by ravines and rocks. They turned aside into a path and rode straight forward along a roadless track, guided by the setting sun. The wind swayed the tree-tops and the wood seemed haunted by a dull, uncanny moaning sound. A wilderness lay spread around them, and the gathering darkness made it look still more gloomy and forbidding. At length Broda stopped his horse.

"Alight, sir! Here we must leave the horses and go forward on foot," he said.

"Shall we find them later in such darkness?" Vok anxiously inquired.

"Don't be afraid. I know this place well," said Broda, springing to the ground.

They unharnessed and tethered the horses and Broda, taking his pupil's arm, turned into the thickest part of the forest. But they had only proceeded a few paces when the figure of a man holding a naked sword, appeared from behind a tree and barred their way.

"Who comes?" he asked.

"Brothers, on their way to the Temple of Sion!" answered Broda. "Let us pass, Juste; and have a care of our horses."

After a few moments they emerged from the wood. Before them lay a narrow though deep hollow beset with rocks. Deep in the hollow red flames here and there twinkled amid the darkness.

"Here is our meeting-place. We are just in time," said Broda, and began carefully descending a path which turned and twisted like a snake.

Nearly two hundred people were gathered on a little meadow in the hollow's depths. They were of various aspects and ages, and of both sexes. Most of them were peasants, but there were nobles and craftsmen among them. On all faces could be read the solemn influence of the moment.

An altar had been arranged upon a large elevated stone, and a number of torches lit up the big silver cross, the Bible in its gilded cover, and the tall figure of the old

priest. His thin face wore an inspired expression, and his eyes shone with fervor.

Vok and Broda made their way through the crowd and fell on their knees to the right of the altar.

"Sad times have fallen upon us, my brethren," the preacher was saying; and his deep, sonorous, impressive voice resounded through the valley. "A heavy load oppresses us, for the true sons of Christ must perforce gather like thieves in the night to celebrate the holy sacraments. But let us not lose heart! The earlier Christians suffered more than we. They too gathered in secret, underground places, hiding from the wrath of impious heathens. We flee the wrath of the thrice-crowned, double-visaged Antichrist, who, like a rotten apple, hath fallen apart, one half being enthroned in Rome, the other in Avignon. And the heathens, swollen with pride and swayed by passions, have dared to conceal the truths of the Gospel behind their own conceits. When did the Savior say that His Word should be preached in a tongue unknown to the hearers? Yet we are tied to the Latin mass, and they would affirm that the Bohemian tongue is not worthy to be spoken in presence of the altar. Are not all tongues and nations equal before the Lord? . . .

"But that is nothing to the audacious sacrilege of their attempt upon the most holy of all the sacraments—the Holy Eucharist—by which they dare to separate that which Christ united forever. Breaking the bread He said, *'Take ye and eat; this is My body';* and He gave them the cup with these words, *'Take ye and drink, all*

of ye, for this is My blood of the New Testament.' Against these words of Christ as against a rock should be shattered all the vain babble, all the idle controversies of man. But unhappily it is not so. Some through weakness and ignorance, others through baseness and vanity, allow themselves to be deprived of such a priceless blessing as the chalice, that receptacle of the blood of Christ, that inexhaustible source of spiritual welfare, of health to body and soul. We will be faithful to Christ's commandments; and no misusage shall prevent us from gathering to pray after the manner of our fathers! . . ."

An approving murmur greeted the words of the preacher. The service was brought to a conclusion, and the priest began to give the communion in both kinds, the worshipers passing in turn before the chalice, calmly and ecstatically observing the dictates of the Eastern faith. The picture, illuminated only by the light of the torches, was inexpressibly solemn, and seemed as though impregnated with something mystical.

Vok was infected by the bearing of the rest and of their religious exaltation, especially impressive to his ardent young soul. Trembling with emotion he approached the altar, and for the first time in his life, partook of the body and blood of Christ.

The communion ended, the altar and the other holy objects were hidden away. Bonfires were lighted. The worshipers mingled together and sat down upon the grass. Roast meat, wine, and bread were produced from a great basket, and a brotherly feast commenced.

When their first hunger was satisfied, and when the wine-cups had circulated freely, Broda arose, and all eyes turned towards him.

"Friends and brothers in Christ!" he said. "Our revered Father Nicholas has just fortified our souls by communion and by the wisdom of his words. Let an old soldier put before you some thoughts which have been given rise to by the experiences of a long life, and by the sermon we have just been hearing. It is true that we, like thieves, gather secretly to worship God, which every Christian should be free to do in the light of day. And why? What people are the cause of this unjust oppression? The foreigners! The Italian Pope and his devilish abettors the *Germans!* When the Emperor Charles still reigned the chalice was offered, unopposed, to the faithful. The Emperor and Empress at their coronation communicated in both kinds. And now? Since the university was opened the foreigners have assumed such power that the Germans have placed their feet upon our heads and have forced us even to deny the teachings of Christ. Who are they who with most strength and obstinacy stand for that sacrilegious innovation—communion by bread alone? The German professors and students who drive us from the university, as the burghers drive us from the towns, and the settlers from the soil. Is that not the height of effrontery? Has not the time yet risen to place limits to the humiliation of our nation? Yes, my friends and brethren! I feel that the day of the decisive struggle is rapidly approaching, and each of us

must be prepared for ruthless warfare, since peace between us and the Germans means—our ruin! Our enemy is a terrible enemy. He welcomes any means for our destruction. Neither conscience, nor honor, nor humanity can stay him. Violence, perfidy, villainy and deceit—all are fit weapons to be used against us. But one thing he has forgotten—that we are those same Bohemians from whom great heroes have sprung, such as Zabo of wondrous valor and the doughty Benik Germanovitch. He has forgotten that on the day when our country awakens she will crush the German serpent beneath her heel. Let us prepare fighters and leaders for that day, my brothers. Let us each work as best he can; to sustain those who falter; to uphold those who are striving for our country, our customs, and our tongue; who seek to win for us our rightful place of habitation.

"The aim is worth the struggle. Bohemia for the Bohemians, the free and happy life of ancient times under the protection of our ancient laws—and the expulsion of the foreigners!"

Broda was filled with animation. His eyes flashed with zeal and courage, and his powerful hand clutched at the dagger in his belt.

With his broad, mighty figure, his strong face eloquent of firmness and intelligence, he seemed in the reddish light of the fires and torches like an incarnation of those legendary heroes whose names he had mentioned, like an impersonation of that patient, heroic Bohemian nation which twelve centuries of incessant struggle has failed to

subdue, which till to-day stands like a valiant, faithful sentry at the gates of *Slavdom*.

Those listening to his words were conscious of the warm access of love for their fatherland and faith in its destiny which emanated from this future soldier of Zizka's army. From all lips, even those of women, burst forth the simultaneous cry:

"Long live Bohemia! Death to the Germans!"

Then the old priest arose and raising his hand for silence, admonished the company.

"Nothing can be accomplished, my brethren, without the help of God! Let us not pray to our Heavenly Father for the death of the sinners, but for their removal, remembering the words of the Lord: 'Vengeance is Mine, and I will repay!' "

He sank upon his knees and chanted a prayer which the rest repeated after him in chorus:

"King of Heaven! Hear us, Thy people! Incline unto us and send unto our days prosperity!"

After the prayer another meeting for the following spring was arranged. Then those present swore one to another to maintain an indefatigable struggle against the enemy, and after some further time spent in conversation the meeting silently dispersed.

All this produced an overwhelming effect upon Vok's impressionable nature. For a long time he rode in silent thought by Broda's side. Then, suddenly seizing his hand and bending towards him in the saddle, he whispered passionately:

"Broda, I too will work for the delivery of our country, and for the preservation of Christ's Word!"

"I believe thee, sir, and will rely upon thy promise! Let but all rich and powerful people such as thou unite with us and we shall triumph. . . . But remember one thing: all that thou seest and hearest must be kept in unbroken secrecy. And now at dawn we must indeed go hunting so as not to return home empty-handed, and thereby awake suspicion."

VII

RUGENA little by little grew accustomed to her new surroundings. The Count and his wife tried by every means within their power to attach the child to them, indulging her, and giving in to her slightest caprice; and as consequence of such kind treatment there was soon established a good understanding between Rugena and her gay, kind-hearted guardian. But the little girl still maintained her antipathy for the Countess in spite of all that lady's amiability. Nothing could conquer Rugena's instinctive dislike of her aunt. Vok was also kind and attentive to his little betrothed, in whose budding beauty he even took some pride. The considerable difference in their ages, however, prevented at that time any real attachment between them; besides which the lively and enterprising nature of the youth frequently drove him forth from the dull and monotonous life of his father's house, and kept him absent for weeks, even months at a time.

Rugena's inseparable companion and best-loved friend was Svietomir. His life had changed considerably since the arrival of the little lady, whose protection proved to be more powerful and efficient than that of Vok.

Rugena, with her fine and penetrating intelligence, at

once became aware that her guardians were endeavoring to please and attract her; and as the Count was still more indulgent to her than his wife she asked him that Svietomir might sit next to her at table. If at any time he were absent from his place she would touch nothing. With no less obstinacy she insisted that he should be allowed to play with her as soon as he had finished his lessons; and the first time Father Ilarius dared to use the rod to him Rugena sobbed so bitterly and was so distracted that the Countess implored her confessor to be more careful in his behavior towards his pupil, and not to cause dissension between her and her future daughter-in-law about such a trifle as the teaching of "that blockhead" Svietomir.

So life ran on comparatively peacefully at Castle Waldstein, but without its walls political events of the greatest importance were occurring, which bathed Bohemia in blood and plunged her into all the horrors of civil warfare.

A few months after Rugena's arrival the Count departed to the court of King Venceslas, who was then awaiting the arrival of his brother, Sigismund, King of Hungary.

This perfidious and dishonest man had all his life cast envious eyes upon the inheritance of King Venceslas. He had in every possible way abused his brother's trust, and hoped now to make use of the approaching meeting to conclude finally the secret agreement he had made

against him with the Austrian lords and dukes. Securing the King's consent to his appointment as viceroy, he on the first convenient occasion confined Venceslas within his own court. The two following years were years of tumult and ceaseless warfare. Sigismund crushed the country beneath a load of taxes, and delivered it over to hordes of inimical Magyars by whose inroads Bohemia was despoiled by fire and plunder like a conquered land.

Sigismund's behavior filled the people with dismay, and arrayed upon the side of Venceslas a considerable number of the nobility. The occupation of Kutna Hora, from which place Sigismund stole his brother's treasure and extorted a pitiless redemption, still more augmented the universal indignation.

Waldstein took an active part in all these events, and in most of his military expeditions he was accompanied by his son, who soon distinguished himself by his great courage in battle. It seemed indeed that Vok's hot, impulsive nature had been especially created for a life of warfare. Their own castle was provided with a garrison and stocked with provisions, while Broda was appointed principal commander and supervisor, since it was possible to place full confidence in his fidelity and experience. Only at times, therefore, did the Count himself return home for a few days to see his family, inspect the guard, and give certain necessary orders.

On one of these visits he brought with him a little girl a year or two older than Rugena, whom he designed as a

companion for her. The child's name was Anna, and she was the sister of a young Bohemian noble, John Zizka of Trocnov, an adherent to the King's party, and long a sworn enemy of Heinrich Rosenberg.

VIII

It was the 25th of December, 1408, and Christmas was being celebrated in the city of Prague. The whole town was in movement. In the squares, in hastily erected wooden booths, tradesmen were briskly selling their wares: toys, cakes, sweetmeats, various holy objects, and so on.

Wandering acrobats were exhibiting their strength and agility; fortune-tellers mingled with the crowds; while some sort of wizard, balancing himself upon a wagon, proclaimed for sale various secrets for imparting beauty, charms for awakening love, pomades warranted to restore gray hair to its original color, infusions warranted to cure all disorders, and charmed money warranted to bring good trade. The merry, laughing, jostling crowd was consuming the sweetmeats, listening to the prophecies, and buying all sorts of drugs and talismans. Nevertheless, an observant spectator would have noticed that the gaiety and carelessness of the crowd was rather assumed than real, save perhaps in the women and children.

Men were gathered in groups loudly discussing, in Bohemian or in German, various questions relating to Pope Gregory XII, the King, John Hus, the council at Pisa, and the distribution of votes according to nationalities in the University. It must be remarked that the

Germans and Bohemians gathered separately, and that the inimical glances and provocative remarks which they exchanged boded no good.

Two men in dark cloaks were walking silently across the great square in the new town, mixing with none of the chattering groups. One of these was Broda, the teacher of knightly accomplishments at the castle of Count Waldstein.

The passage of the years seemed at first to have left no traces upon him: his tall and mighty figure was just as straight and supple; he betrayed the same calm faith in his gigantic strength and vigorous health; his keen eyes had not lost their fire, and looked sternly out from beneath their overhanging brows. Only the silver threads among his hair, and the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes gave hint that he too must at length succumb to the ravages of time.

Broda's companion was a young man of about twenty, tall and slight. His face was pale and tender-hued as that of a girl, his features were regular, and his head was covered with thick, fair hair. His mild gray eyes shone with intelligence. At that moment a look of sadness was clouding his gaze, and there was an expression of discontent upon his red, delicately chiseled lips.

The couple reached the corner of the square, lost in silent thought. Near by stood an eating-house, and through the wide-open door could be seen a big room set out with benches and tables. At the further end of the room was a counter covered with bottles and tankards.

Joints of meat and various kinds of game hung roasting upon spits in front of the enormous hearth, and the warm, appetizing smell penetrated even into the street. Broda stopped, inhaling the tempting odor, and said, turning to his companion:

"Let us enter, Svietomir! We'll eat some goose and drink a glass of wine! Thou hast eaten nothing to-day, and that is not right. Devil take it, thou art not yet a monk! Right thinking comes not from an empty stomach."

The young man glanced into the room, and, as though to dispel unwelcome thoughts, passed his hand across his face.

"Come then," he said; "only the place is filled with Germans, and they are most likely drunk."

"Why, heed them not! Shall we incommode ourselves, forsooth, fearing to disturb them?" asked Broda, derisively. As he spoke he entered the eating-house.

The room was filled to overflowing, and nearly all the tables were occupied by Germans—monks, burghers, and students. Only at the far end, near the fireplace, one or two groups of Bohemians sat and conversed, almost in whispers. They were for the most part tradesmen or workers. Broda and Svietomir took places at a table already occupied by two—a student and a fat merchant. These glanced askance at the new-comers, and then continued talking loudly with others at a neighboring table.

They were discussing, in German, the burning topics of the day: the dissensions between the rival Popes, to which

the congress of cardinals in Pisa was to have put an end, and the distribution of votes at the University. The student was relating how a few days previously the rector, Heinrich von Baltenhagen, had summoned a great conference at which representatives of the archbishop had assisted, and how, after an animated debate and a splendid speech from Master Gubner, the majority had decided that the University and the priesthood should remain faithful to Pope Gregory XII.

"A just and wise decision! Christians cannot make sport of conscience according to the demands of the moment, and cast a Pope away as though he were an apple and not the head of the Christian Church," shouted the richly-clad, red-faced burgher.

"Aye, thou art right, Gotthold! We all will remain loyal to Pope Gregory XII. After the decision of so august an assembly the King will never yield to the slanders of the Wycliffites and grant his approval to the cardinals," added another German.

"Let us hope so! And indeed it were time that a check were put to the shameless intrigues of these sectarians. Thanks to them Bohemia has been suspected of heresy and put to shame in the face of the Christian world," said the first burgher; and added some offensive words concerning the Bohemian national party, and its attempts to uphold the rights of its people.

"They will achieve nothing, for we are the head and hands of the country! What would these stupid savages be without us? They would wallow in their ignorance

like cattle had not we Germans blessed them with our science and commerce, our laws and customs, which have made them into human beings!" said the student boastfully.

With a side-glance at Svietomir, whose face had flushed and paled alternately at his insolent words, he continued in a mocking tone:

"I repeat, they will achieve nothing, for we are a master race, created to command the lower races. But in order to avoid useless worry, and to put an end once for all to their ridiculous pretensions it were better to cut out the tongues of such dangerous chatterboxes as John Hus and Jerome. They preach not piety, but set hatred alight. They fling themselves like dogs upon the higher spiritual dignitaries, and rejoice that they can spread their filth before the bootmakers and swineherds and suchlike trash who are ready to listen to them."

Broda appeared not to pay the slightest attention to the provocative speeches of his neighbor, but attacked his slice of goose with appetite, drinking his wine, and only bestowing a passing glance from time to time at the fat burgher, whose red, greasy face shone with conceit. But at the name of Hus he pushed his plate away, and turning to the German struck his fist upon the table with the words:

"Enough of this! I would counsel you to leave the preacher of the Bethlehem chapel in peace! Who should be a scourge of vice if not he—the model of all Christian virtues?"

"What has it to do with thee, blockhead?" the student interrupted indignantly. "Thy model of virtues is a heretic, whom the King will burn alive one of these fine days, as he hath lately promised. Now, the dog is sick of fright, and will die of it, they say."

" 'Tis not worth thy heat, Gotthold! What have we to do with this Bohemian vagabond?" the fat burgher remarked with a disdainful laugh. "He is belike one of Hus's swineherds of whom thou hast just spoken."

" 'Tis true, thou German drunkard!" roared Broda. "I am a swineherd, and this is how I deal with foreign swine when they dare fall upon my herd."

He rose threateningly to his full height, and in an instant, before anybody knew what was happening, he was at the German's elbow. Clutching him with one hand by the belt and with the other by his collar he lifted him like a child into the air and flung him from the room. The German flew over the tables like a stone from a catapult, and crashed upon the pavement without, overturning several of the passers-by.

A commotion arose in the street, but within the room, for the first few moments, deathlike silence reigned. Then the Germans rose in a body, with furious cries and oaths. Weapons gleamed in their hands and jugs and tankards flashed above their heads, despite the heated protests of the host.

At that moment the burgher who had been flung out appeared in the doorway, and foaming at the mouth with rage rushed like a madman upon Broda. But the latter,

who, like Svietomir, had drawn his sword, repulsed the attackers with the greatest composure. The other Bohemians present joined them, and a general scrimmage began. The terrible cries and noise, and the sound of breaking crockery, tables, and benches soon gathered a crowd about the outer door. The spectators also, with words if not with deeds, took a lively part in the proceedings.

Broda and Svietomir with the aid of their weapons fought their way to the door, and had scarcely emerged into the street when a detachment of the guards, summoned by one of the townsmen, appeared upon the field of battle. But the majority of the spectators were upon the side of Broda, the fame of whose deed had spread from mouth to mouth; and the crowd made way for him and his companion, protecting them like a wall.

They had succeeded in escaping down a side-street long before the guard had been made to understand what had occurred.

"A sound lesson thou gavest that German braggart!" said Svietomir, laughing, as he walked behind Broda in the narrow lane.

"Now that he has flattened his nose upon the pavement he will not carry it so high! Come, to Zizka's. I must needs tell him of our adventure. He will be mightily diverted," said Broda, merrily.

They crossed the famous bridge built by Charles IV across the Moldau, and turned into a deserted winding by-street in the old town.

It was already night when they stopped at the door of a poor-looking house, and they were obliged to grope their way up the narrow crooked staircase. At length they knocked at a door from beneath which a ray of light could be observed.

The room was spacious, but simply furnished. A large bed with bright-colored curtains stood against the wall, and at a table in the middle of the room upon which an oil lamp was burning, three people sat. They were an old woman, as clean as an apple; a little girl who was playing with a wooden sheep; and a young man of about thirty with a clever, courageous face. His dark eyes shone forth sternly from beneath thick brows. One felt an exuberance of hidden force in him, and his whole appearance was expressive of inherent austerity, curiously mingled with nobility, and even magnanimity.

Zizka, for this was Zizka, was dressed—as was Broda—after the Polish manner. He was sitting, writing; but at the entrance of the guests he rose to greet them, and turning to the old woman who was shaking hands with them, said:

"Take the child away, dear aunt, and bring us some wine."

"Thy little child is lovely and well-grown," observed Broda as they took their seats around the table.

"She remarkably resembles my departed wife, and my aunt cherishes her as though she were her daughter," said Zizka, pouring wine into the brass wine-cups which the old woman had brought.

Broda began relating the incident in the eating-house in a voice which, though contented, at times grew angry. Zizka in his turn described a courageous attack against Rosenberg which he had carried out some months before, when, at the head of his doughty comrades, he had devastated the property of his all-mighty enemy, and extorted a ransom from him.

Svietomir took no part in the conversation, and fell again into a fit of gloomy abstraction, seeing and hearing nothing.

"What is amiss with Svietomir? He seems so strange to-night," Zizka remarked, observing him attentively.

"The poor youth received sad news yesterday evening, and I know not how to help him," answered Broda with a sigh. "Thus it is: thou knowest that the Countess Waldstein—the devil knows wherefore—has bethought herself to make Svietomir a priest, notwithstanding his loathing for the sacred calling. Thinking he had two years before him we were quite at ease, when yesterday, of a sudden, came a command to him to repair straightway to the Brevnovsk Monastery, there to become a novice. Had they but caused him to enter the secular priesthood one could have bought a parish for him and so assured his future. But to make a monk of him! . . ."

"I desire neither the one nor the other! I will cast myself into the Moldau rather than let them shave me!" Svietomir said firmly, his voice trembling with agitation.

"Well, well, if thou so little valuest thy life then lay it

down for something high and useful," said Zizka. "A thought hath entered my head. In a few days I go to Cracow, where I have friends among the Polish nobles. Come thou with me and enter the service of King Vēadiglao! Young warriors are everywhere and at all times gladly welcomed, and I think I can help thee on this path and gain for thee favor of the highest nobles. What dost thou say to that?"

Svietomir's face shone with joy.

"With all my heart!" he cried gladly, stretching out both hands to Zizka. "Take me with thee, John, and I swear I will put thee to no shame! I am ready in all honesty to fight and die for the King. And I shall be free, and enabled to cast off the yoke they would hang about my neck in exchange for shelter and a crust of bread."

Zizka warmly returned his grasp.

"Our hands upon it, then! For the present seem to submit; and later thou shalt set forth upon the road to Cracow instead of that which leads to Grevnov. So here's to the sword instead of the tonsure."

"To the sword!" cried Svietomir, joyfully toasting him.

And then, having arranged a few more details of this project so unexpectedly arisen, the friends separated.

After many years of emptiness and solitude the ancient castle of Rabstein had again received its young mistress beneath its roof. It was six months since Rugena, with

her friend Anna and her devoted servants Itka and Matthias, had taken up her abode again in the home of her fathers. She lived in complete solitude, rarely quitting the castle and receiving nobody.

During all the preceding years she had lived in Waldstein Castle, with the exception of two winters she had passed with her guardians in Prague.

Countess Waldstein, absorbed in her extreme piety, and exceedingly economical, held aloof from society. She was, besides, anxious that Rugena should not make her appearance in the world until she was safely married. The Countess feared, not without cause, that the rich and lovely heiress would attract admirers who might be dangerous rivals to Vok. She even regarded the childish attachment between Rugena and Svietomir with suspicion, and did not rest until the latter was despatched to Prague, there to enter the University.

Rugena was greatly grieved at the separation from the friend of her childhood, and her dejection was still further increased by the indisposition occasioned by a bad chill she had caught at a hunt to which she had been taken for distraction.

A few months after Svietomir's departure she became so seriously ill that fears were even entertained for her life.

Although she recovered from this illness her health was impaired, and the doctor insisted that her marriage should be delayed for a year or two. At this time they were awaiting the return of Vok from France, whither he had

gone to amuse and disport himself; when the Countess suddenly received the unexpected news of her inheritance in Italy, and decided to hasten there without delay. She wished to take Rugena with her, but the young girl did not like the plan.

At their first meeting the Countess had produced a disagreeable impression upon her, and neither time, nor the caresses and attention of her aunt had been able to conquer the instinctive repulsion she felt for her. Besides which she excessively disliked the Countess's Italian relative who had sometimes visited them in Bohemia; and had no desire to suffer this lady's hospitality and society for several months. Therefore she declared that she would like, during her aunt's absence, to return to the old castle, which she had not seen since her father's death, in order to pray by his grave and pass the last months of her girlhood in solitude.

Her guardian unhesitatingly gave his consent. The country was comparatively peaceful at that time, the castle was strongly fortified and provided with a sufficient guard, and it was near enough to Prague for the Count to visit during his intervals of freedom from service upon the King. With the deepest joy, therefore, Rugena returned to the spot where the happiest years of her life had been passed, where every object reminded her of the father she had adored.

One bright, though cold January morning the friends were sitting together in the room which had formerly served as a study to Baron Rabstein.

Anna was diligently at work upon a white silk altar-cloth which she was embroidering with vine-leaves in different-colored silks. She was a pretty girl, fresh and blooming, and her black hair was twisted into two heavy plaits which reached her knees. Her small aquiline nose and her mouth with its expression of energy slightly resembled those of her brother; but her large dark eyes, so mild and joyful, in no way recalled Zizka's stern and thoughtful gaze.

Rugena was doing nothing. She sat, reclining against the high back of her armchair, gazing thoughtfully through the window at the widespread winter landscape. Near her, on a cushion, lay her favorite dog, whose head, as she thus sat dreaming, Rugena from time to time mechanically fondled.

She had fulfilled her early promise of great beauty. She was a radiant and lovely girl, tall and graceful, with a clear pale face, large dark-blue eyes of extraordinary luster, and boldly penciled brows. Her hair had retained the golden tinge of childhood, and the thick plait gleamed bright against the dark-blue material of her dress. With the stately grace of her young figure, the smooth rose-hued skin of her tender face, her mass of curls, and her clear bright gaze, she resembled one of those dream-like ethereal forms the creation of which was the triumph of the brush of Fra Angelico.

Suddenly Rugena's dreamy gaze became alert, and she sat up in her chair.

"Two horse-riders are approaching the castle. Look,

Anna, who can they be?" she asked, gazing fixedly through the window.

Anna pushed aside her embroidery-frame and also approached the window.

"They are far still, and so encumbered with their cloaks that it is difficult to distinguish them. Maybe thy betrothed hath sent thee a letter by a messenger."

"I doubt that Vok would spend so much time upon me," laughed Rugena. "He is at the Court now, and such attention would assuredly not enter his mind. But think not that it grieves me or that I thirst to see him or have news of him. I am so happy here that I should like well to stay here. And, thou, Anna?"

"I am always happy with thee, and 'tis my fondest wish never to part from thee," said Anna, tenderly kissing her friend.

The horsemen disappeared through the entrance to the courtyard, and a few minutes later the sound of the horn at the gates announced the approach of guests.

Though both girls were extremely anxious to know who had arrived they awaited the announcement, and when a little page ran in breathless to inform his mistress that John of Trocnov and Svietomir Kryshanov were below they both flew to meet the new-comers.

Anna flung herself upon her brother's neck and Rugena was about to do the same with Svietomir; but the three years of separation had so changed her friend that she stopped short in confusion and at length

stretched forth her hand, which the youth repeatedly pressed to his lips.

"Heavens, how pleased am I to see thee! I have so much to speak of and to hear from thee. But wait, dear one," she said with a smile, withdrawing her hand, "I have yet to greet thy companion."

When the greetings had been exchanged Rugena turned joyfully to her friend, with the words:

"See to thy brother, Anna! Order that rooms be at once prepared for him and Svietomir, and that food be served to them without delay. And forget not to make additions to our supper. Let us go to the dining-hall."

After a hearty meal the young hostesses and their guests separated in pairs. Anna wished to speak with her brother before taking leave of him, and Rugena to question Svietomir on many things. As in the days of their childhood she led him to her room, and they sat together before the fire.

The first impression which had made this close friend seem a stranger to her little by little died away.

Noticing Svietomir's gaze fixed upon her with unconcealed delight, she said to him with her accustomed frankness:

"Why dost thou gaze with such attention at me?"

"I cannot refrain from admiring thee. My God, how lovely thou art, Rugena! Thou art so like an angel that I look for thy wings!"

Rugena burst into laughter.

"Hast thou nothing more sensible to say to me? But

not to be outdone in courtesy, I will tell thee that thou art grown and improved in looks, and that the down upon thy lip becomes thee mightily. Now, let us speak of other things! Tell me how thou hast chanced hither with John?"

Svietomir related what was impelling him to flee to Poland.

"And I profited with the chance to say farewell to thee, perhaps forever. For who knows what may lie before a poor soldier? And what dost thou think of my plan?"

During his recital Rugena's face, in spite of her new self-control, had expressed the emotion she felt.

"Why speak thus of eternal separation!" she began, trying to speak cheerfully. "Cracow is not at the world's end, and not all perish in warfare. I am firmly persuaded that we shall meet again, and I approve thy decision. 'Tis unworthy to be a priest after the kind of Father Ilarius, and thou wilt never make a second Father John, I think."

"True! The very thought of debating with him seemeth sacrilege to me!" Svietomir said, warmly. "Master John is—a saint, whose knowledge is equal to his virtue! All in Prague who are poor, suffering, or unfortunate hasten to him. And for all he has help and comfort. The Queen reveres him; the most powerful honor and respect him—and thinkest thou that he is proud of this? In no wise! He is mild and humble, accessible to all, and useth rich and poor alike. And

what a preacher! His words kindle and inspire the soul; one's conscience trembles in listening to him, one is ashamed of one's spiritual poverty; one resolves with all one's strength to rise to better things. And when he begins to thunder against the vice of men, without distinction of rank, Holy Savior! it seems as if Michael the Archangel himself were making ready to smite the fiends! Broda and I have not missed one of his sermons. The Queen herself often visits the Bethlehem Chapel."

"I love and honor Master John with all my heart. During the two winters we spent in Prague he schooled me in faith and gave me my first communion. Vok and my guardian revere him highly, and pronounce him Bohemia's good genius."

"Undoubtedly he is that! He knows how to awaken love for the Fatherland in the soul! Now too, he is at work to improve Bohemian orthography, that our tongue may be as pure and pliant as the Latin, and that the Germans may no longer term it the jargon of savages."

Having chanced upon this subject Svietomir described the whole course of the struggle of the Bohemians in the university. In this manner the hours passed imperceptibly until supper-time, after which all repaired to their rooms. But Rugena, before retiring to rest, summoned Matthias to her, and ordered him to prepare a couple of the finest riding horses for Svietomir, and a complete set of weapons, which she herself would select from among those belonging to her father. Then she went with him to the secret room near the library where

the objects they had hidden long ago were still preserved.

Ordering that two saddle-bags should be filled with money, she began her selection from among the weapons and objects of gold, laying aside for Svietomir a dagger, its handle embossed with precious stones, a sword with an Italian blade, and a richly worked silver drinking-cup.

When she opened the casket containing her mother's jewels, and the diamonds, rubies, and emeralds flashed forth thousand-colored flames in the light of Matthias's torch, Rugena laughed lightly.

"How angry my guardians were, especially the Countess, at the loss of these boxes!" she said. "How much time they spent in searching for them!" . . .

She picked up a long necklace of snowy pearls and let them slip through her fingers.

"They would certainly be adorning the reverend Bishop Brancaccio, or Cardinal Cossa, hadst thou not been so far-sighted, my good Matthias," she said, smiling.

Taking from the casket a heavy gold chain set with precious stones, a buckle for the hat, and a sapphire ring, she left the hiding-place, and Matthias, beaming with happiness, closed the aperture again.

Next morning Rugena and Anna, with the help of Itka, set to work to pack the traveling-case destined for Svietomir, filling it with linen, some suits which had belonged to the dead Baron, and various trifles. The rest of the day passed happily in conversation and in contriving plans for the future when Svietomir should return a hero.

After supper, which was served earlier than usual, Anna led her brother aside to present him with Rugena's gifts, and the young hostess took Svietomir to her room, where the pleasant surprises were awaiting him.

Rejoiced and touched by her kindness, Svietomir examined the weapons, the clothes, and the heavily-loaded saddle-bags which set him free from all anxiety regarding the means of subsistence. Falling upon his knees he gratefully pressed Rugena's hand to his lips.

"How can I thank thee for the generosity with which thou hast come to my help? Thou hast provided me with plenitude and eased my path in life!" he whispered, with tears in his eyes.

"By acting in all life's amenities according to God's will and the laws of honor. Why, we are both orphans, and as God has blessed me with happiness and abundance may I not help a friend of my childhood in a hard moment? I wish not that thou shouldst make a poorer show than others, Svietomir; and I know that men will respect thee more if thou art well equipped and hast a full purse in thy pocket."

"I swear to be worthy of thee. Thy bright image will be my guiding star, remembrance of thee my last thought if I be fated to die in battle. Daily will I pray for thy happiness and Vok's, that God may bless your union."

Rugena listened thoughtfully to this speech, but at the last words she smiled, and pushing forward an armchair motioned Svietomir towards it.

"What is this chatter?" she said. "Thou knowest as

well as I that our marriage will take place not for love, but for family reasons."

There was a blending of anger and mockery in her voice.

"Vok does not love me, and I feel nothing for him. They say that love is a heavenly gift, sent us by God. But no man till to-day hath roused that feeling in me, and I much doubt that Vok will do so."

"Why so? Vok is handsome and attractive, and full of knightly honor; and there can be no shade of doubt that he will love thee. Who could look calmly upon thee without exulting? Especially he to whom thou wilt belong. And how can he fail to admire and take pride in thee when in all Prague is no woman to compare with thee?"

Rugena laughed. She knew, of course, that she was beautiful; but her native modesty and artlessness had kept her from pride in the knowledge. Now the passionate adoration betrayed in the words and looks of this friend of her childhood amused her.

She placed both her hands upon the shoulders of the youth, and looking into his face said roguishly:

"Ta, ta, ta! Art not thou thyself enamored of me that thou dost sing me such hymns?"

"Do not mock me, Rugena! Could such a sorry fool as I dare lift his eyes to thee?" Svietomir said, flushing.

"Not because thou art poor, but because a love like that would be a heavy encumbrance for thee, and a hindrance in thy life! . . . Yes, happily thou hast nothing like

that," said Rugena, growing serious. "Preserve for me, Svietomir, a brother's love, as I will be a faithful sister to thee. Remember that thou hast a tried friend to whom thou canst turn in a difficult moment. Know that in me thou canst ever find comfort, good counsel, and material aid, if need be. But if in the course of years thou visitest us again with thy heart still free, look well at Anna, our childhood's dear friend, and perhaps thou mayest yet receive her a bride from these hands of mine."

The youth was dumbfounded and confused. For some time he did not speak.

"Anything that comes from thee promises me happiness," he said firmly at last. "If I return to Prague I will try to love her whom thou proposest as a wife for me."

"Let us hope that the future bring joy for us both. Go now and rest: a long journey is before thee to-morrow. Kiss me farewell before our long separation as in former days when we were children," said Rugena, embracing him, filled with emotion.

The travelers set forth next morning. Svietomir sprang bravely on to the splendid horse led out by Matthias, and cantered delightedly round the courtyard. On taking leave he cast a furtive look at Anna, and saw that she was beautiful indeed, though not to be compared to Rugena.

From the self-same window through which they had watched the riders' approach Anna and Rugena now

followed them with long, farewell glances until they had disappeared from view.

Then Anna silently began to work, and Rugena took up her prayer-book; but she did not open it. She cast stealthy glances at her sorrowful friend, who was working abstractedly, surreptitiously wiping away the tears which fell from her eyes.

"Why dost thou weep, Anna? Thy brother will soon return," said Rugena, suddenly.

Anna started.

"Nevertheless I fear for him—the roads are not quite safe," she answered confusedly.

"Art thou not ashamed to lie so? Thy brother is not the cause of thy tears. They flow because of the parting with Svietomir. I have remarked since long that thou wert partial to him, but as he was destined for the priesthood I had no right to speak of it. But now it is different. He is a warrior, and when he returns why should he not love a pretty maid like thee? I will give thee a dowry, and thou shalt marry Svietomir!"

"Ah, speak not so, Rugena!" said Anna, flushing. "When Svietomir returns, a hero, there will be not a few rich and beautiful maidens to love him. He will not even notice me. And besides, thou well knowest it is thee he loves."

"Ah, jealous one! I shall be married then to Vok, and wherefore should Svietomir love me? Am I a Madonna that men should be satisfied by silently adoring me? Take heed thyself that some rich gentleman

from Prague come not a-courting fair Anna of Trocnov, and thus leave poor Svietomir lamenting!"

"There is no fear of that. Svietomir is too good and kind to be forgotten. Can it be that he doth not please thee? Dost thou consider Vok more handsome? He is so proud and haughty. When he is wrathful his eyes are terrible: they pierce like spurs! B—r—r—r, I am afraid of him! Dost thou not fear to be his wife?"

Rugena leaned her beautiful head against the back of her chair and fell thoughtful. Her life in the Waldsteins' house passed like a panorama before her, and she pondered the relations between herself and her betrothed.

There had been no approach to intimacy or tenderness, or even real understanding between them. For one thing, the difference in their years, for another the character of the youth himself, had persistently held them apart. He had been kind and attentive to his little betrothed, had showered gifts upon her, and even played with her. But the child had felt that he despised the games, and that they wearied him, and that he could never be to her a playfellow, like Svietomir.

After some silence she sat up in her chair.

"I will tell thee, Anna. I do not fear Vok, but neither do I love him; even as I love not Svietomir! The one is too sugar-sweet, too much of a cherub as one might say; the other is too frivolous and insignificant. I cannot well explain it to thee; but, in a word, they both lack something the man must possess who shall make me love him."

"Dear Lord! What dost thou wish? What unattainable ideal hast thou imagined for thyself?" asked Anna in amazement.

"I have imagined nothing. Such a man as the one I think of exists. I saw him first very long ago, but I have never forgotten him."

"But who is he? Never before hast thou spoken of him," said Anna, curiously.

"Who he is I know not, and do not wish to know. Why should I? I do but liken him to others, and each time I am brought to confess that none can be compared to him. He is the incarnation of knighthood, kind and courageous, and of a great intelligence."

"But where then hast thou seen this perfection of manhood?" said Anna, incredulously, half inclined to laugh.

"I have seen him but twice in my life. The first time on that awful day when I learnt of my father's death. Master John Hus chanced to be at the castle, and that unknown gentleman accompanied him. The next morning before setting forth they both strove to console me for my grievous loss. Master John spoke many words of comfort, but *he* said nothing but 'poor child!' and gently stroked my head. Never shall I forget his look, nor the sound of his voice. Since then his image dwells ever in my memory."

"Of what appearance was he?"

"Tall he was, and thin, with a black beard and great black eyes. Not only outward is his charm; in all things

he is enchanting: his glance, deep, burning, and caressing, his winning and enthralling smile! . . . The second time I saw him was on the eve of our departure from Prague—the last time we visited the city. I stood at the window and saw him riding down the street with other gentlemen. He was proceeding, methinks, to some festival, for he was clad in lilac velvet, and among the rest he seemed like a prince or king. He was talking and laughing merrily, and his gaiety made him doubly beautiful. Methought that were he desirous he might cast a spell upon beholders; and all who accompanied him seemed swayed by his charm, and with delight to listen to his words. They passed swiftly by, but the memory of my beautiful unknown awoke anew in me."

"But we must find out who he is! Perhaps some in the castle may recall who came with Master Hus."

"No. I wish not to seek him out or know who he may be. I told thee that all this is but—a vision, an idle dream. Let it remain thus! I wish not to be disenchanted. They may tell me that he is married and hath seven children, or that he is no knight, but a wealthy draper or pastry-cook! . . . Ugh!" laughed Rugena, amused at her own imaginings.

IX

KING VENCESLAS, upon his return from Silesia, remained in Kutna Hora, residing in his palace there for nearly three months. The King was fond of this commercial town, and the population always expressed unalterable loyalty to him.

It was the 17th of January, 1409, a cold day, with the snow falling in great flakes.

The great hall in the royal palace, in which the King was sitting at that moment, was filled with pleasant warmth, and its luxurious appointments breathed comfort and tranquillity. A bright fire burnt in the great gray marble fireplace, and near the table sat two people playing at dice.

One was the King himself, who was sitting in a large armchair, the high back of which was embroidered with the royal arms. He was absorbed in thought, and leaning with his elbows upon the table sipped abstractedly from a golden drinking-cup which stood near.

The King was a man of about eight and forty, tall and heavily built. Like his brother Sigismund he was handsome, but the cares of ruling, combined with the excesses to which he was habituated (it was said the King had been poisoned), had prematurely aged him, and covered

his face with wrinkles. Yet, notwithstanding the unhealthy redness of his face and the puffiness of his cheeks, King Venceslas was, on the whole, pleasing in appearance. His inherent kindness and frankness of disposition could be perceived in his smile and in his glance when his tired eyes were not dimmed by the fumes of wine; the sufferings he had known in his life had not distorted his lips with lines of bitterness, and the fits of wild rage, so terrible for the beholders, had not deprived him of self-control, or obscured in him the consciousness of his own dignity.

Opposite the King, upon a folding-chair, sat Vok von Waldstein, who also wore an air of abstraction and played in silence. Suddenly the King drew himself up and tossed back his head as though to drive annoying thoughts away, and swallowing the remains of his wine gazed steadily at the frowning face of his youthful partner.

The Count was his favorite. Venceslas was fond of the young man, besides preserving a grateful memory of his skill and courage at the time of the flight from Vienna.

Vok, bold and enterprising, a lover of women as of every sort of adventure, knew better than any one how to divert and entertain the King, relating such marvelous or comic stories that the heavy clouds upon his brow were speedily dispersed, and succeeded by a mirthful mood and peals of laughter. The youth was perfectly at ease with his royal master, and permitted himself a

freedom of speech, amounting at times to insolence, which would have cost dear to any other but himself.

His obstinate silence gave Venceslas to understand that he was angry, and the pains he took to avoid the King's glance proved that the object of his wrath was none other than the august person of the King himself.

With his customary good nature Venceslas began to search his memory for any offense of which he might have been guilty towards this spoilt darling; but he could remember nothing.

"What ails thee, Vok? Thou art dumb as a fish to-day, and angry as a snake whose tail hath been trod upon."

"'Tis nothing, sire. But I was about to ask leave of Your Majesty for a few weeks, for the arrangement of certain of my affairs which demand my immediate presence," answered the youth with cold respect.

The King glanced doubtingly at him; then replacing upon the table the dice-horn he had been holding in his hand, said, half angrily, and half in jest:

"What is this foolish chatter? Thou hast no affairs which need arranging; but I see that thou presumest to be vexed with me. Now, confess what is it thou wouldst have of me? Belike I have forgot the fulfilment of some promise to thee?"

"Nay, sire! I should grow entangled were I to endeavor to select one from among the promises Your Majesty has made and broken. No, 'tis simply that I fear to stay here, and am desirous to depart."

"Fear? Thou art mocking me. I bid thee tell me straightway why thou art wrathful and what thou fearest."

"I fear being burnt alive and offered as roast meat to the Germans!"

The King broke into a prolonged fit of laughter.

"Ah! Thence blows this wind! The several hasty words I spoke to Hus and Jerome have thus upset thee. Be not foolish, dear Vok! How doth it concern thee what I may say to a deputation that hath wearied me with their importunings?"

"How doth it concern me? You forget, sire, that I am a *Bohemian.* I cannot stand by indifferent while my King threatens two of my friends with the stake, and refuses to acknowledge the rights of my people, who have always been loyal and devoted upholders of his throne."

And the young Count began warmly trying to convince the King how right the Bohemians were in demanding for themselves the first place in their own fatherland, and how natural it was for them to be dismayed at the present unjust position of affairs. The King listened attentively and without anger to the passionate words of his young favorite.

"Well, well, if I am negligent in upholding the rights of the Bohemians, they at least slumber not in seeking to uphold them," said the King, laughing good-naturedly. "Since that ill-fated interview I am besieged. Lobkovitz as soon as he beholds me begins to buzz like a bee into my ear, and showers upon me convincing proofs

that he is right and the Germans—wrong. The Queen hath shed fountains of tears in that her confessor lies sick through me. Even thou art harsh to me and threatenest to leave me. It hath come to this, that Abbot Solon of the French legation endeavors to convince me that it is my duty to give three votes to the Bohemians. 'Tis clear that I can no longer live at peace until this matter be decided. But now I wish to sleep! Good-night, my Vok. I'll not be angered at thine impertinence, which was called forth in thee by patriotic fervor. Wear another face to-morrow, and make ready with some merry story of which thou hast so rich a store."

He rose, took a friendly leave of Vok, and went from the hall into an inner apartment.

The sleeping apartment into which the King had entered was lit by a silver lamp which hung from the ceiling, while two wax candles were burning before a shrine. The Queen was at prayer on her knees with a prayer-book in her hands, and did not notice her husband's entrance.

Sophia of Bavaria, daughter of Duke John of Munich, was the second wife of Venceslas. His first wife, Johanna, had met with a tragic death, having been suffocated by a huge hunting-dog which always slept near the King's pillow, and which flung itself upon the Queen as she rose from the bed one night. To the King's intense grief his second union, as his first, proved childless.

Sophia was a kind and gentle woman. She suffered in

silence the King's unfaithfulness, his caprices, and the vexations arising from his unruly passions; and thanks to her patience gained at length some influence over him. This influence the Queen used in aiding and protecting the Bohemians, whom she loved; and all her life she was a jealous upholder of their rights. To the great discontent of the German priests by whom she was surrounded, she chose as her confessor John Hus, and constantly visited the Bethlehem Chapel. This openly-expressed preference for the Bohemians aroused the disapproval of her Bavarian relations, to such a degree that neither her brother nor her uncles, Dukes Stephen and Frederick, would consent to be present at her coronation. The Germans of Prague pronounced the Queen a heretic and Wycliffite.

"Of what sin hast thou been guilty to-day, Sophia, that thou prayest with such fervor?" asked the King, observing that she continued not to notice him.

"No sin! I do but pray for thee, beseeching God to illumine thy heart and reason, and to inspire thee with that justice and impartiality which should grace a King."

"And which I must prove by fulfilling the demands of the Bohemians? I have heard that song before, and desire not that it be sung me even in my bed," said Venceslas, half angrily and half jokingly.

The Queen arose, approached her husband, and kissed his hand.

"I have not yet spoken of that matter, though it af-

fects me to the bottom of my heart, and though I deem it just."

"'Tis unjust, in that the statutes, the custom and will of my father gave priority to the Germans," the King interrupted her calmly.

"I do not feel myself a fit judge in such weighty matters, but both Lobkovitz and the Abbot Solon have opined that the Emperor Charles granted to our University the self-same rights as those of Paris and Bologna, in both of which priority is given to the native-born. Is it not thy duty to set aside customs pronouncedly unjust? 'Tis but in thine own interest I would speak some few words to thee. Whom dost thou protect, my King and husband? Whom dost thou set in the foremost places to the detriment of thy loyal Bohemian subjects? Thy most evil enemies! Is there one deed of treachery or effrontery these Germans have spared thee? Have not they by their stratagems sown discord 'twixt thee and thy brother Sigismund? Did the base, seditious vassals hesitate to deprive thee of thine Empire, setting aside thy rights, while the majority of the electors were faithful to thee? And who in Prague took sides with Rupert of the Palatinate and would assuredly have opened the gates to him at the siege of Meissen, had not the Bohemians opposed them? Why, the Germans! In their arrogance they dared to censure thy decrees and oppose thy will. 'Twas their desire to gain the mastery of thee, God pardon me the words, as they have gained that of the University. Remember how, not long since, they re-

fused to withdraw from their obedience to Pope Gregory XII, while the Bohemians unhesitatingly submitted to thy will? 'Tis to these perfidious and thankless foreigners thou wouldst sacrifice the lawful rights of thy people!"

While the Queen was speaking red spots of anger had appeared upon the face of Venceslas, and his eyes flashed with indignation. The sudden remembrance of the indignities he had suffered awoke his latent anger and resentment. In his passionate though vacillating soul a revolution was in course of progress, defeating all arguments which had hitherto spoken in favor of the Germans, and deciding the victory of the Bohemians.

"Thou art right, Sophia! And what reason have I for mistrusting such a wise and devoted servant as Nicholas Lobkovitz? Truly he is right in maintaining that it is the bounden duty of Bohemia's King to uphold and protect his people's rights, and not offer them, a sacrifice to foreigners! To-morrow I will ordain that a decree be drawn up giving the Bohemians the three votes of which they are so desirous."

Overjoyed at this unlooked-for victory, the Queen threw herself upon her husband's neck.

Next morning Nicholas Lobkovitz was summoned to the palace, where the King handed him the decree, the text of which had been prepared by him long since.

After mature consideration the King approved and signed that momentous act, which abolished German pre-

dominance, and which later was productive of such fateful results in the history of the Bohemian nation.

The deliberation was prolonged and was exhausting to the King, who nevertheless merged from it more cheerful and contented than he had been for a very long time.

After dining he retired to the same hall in which we beheld him on the evening before, and ordered that Vok von Waldstein should be summoned to play dice with him.

The young Count seemed preoccupied and agitated. A short while before he had met Lobkovitz, who had looked at him with deep and joyful significance; but owing to the presence of other courtiers Lobkovitz had been unable to convey more than a silent message.

The King sat down to the table with his favorite.

"To-day, Vok, thou must treat me to some very diverting story as a reward for the good news I have for thee," Venceslas said, heartily. "From to-day thou art freed from all danger of getting roasted and eaten by the Germans. I have but newly played a pretty trick upon them. I have signed a decree giving precedence to the Bohemian nationality over the remaining three."

Waldstein turned pale and leapt to his feet. He had not in the least expected such a signal victory.

Falling to his knees, he kissed the King's hand passionately, while Venceslas patted him in a friendly manner on the shoulder.

"See, what a fiery patriot! And I thought that thy chief interest was centered now in love, and not in politics."

"One does not prevent the other, sire! 'Tis of women one can best learn politics," Vok answered, happily. "Though truly my course in love's career is nearly run," he added, growing serious.

"Why dost thou speak thus, and with such a face besides, as though thou hadst been just condemned to death?"

"Truly it amounteth to that, sire! Death socially, at least."

"What is this? Can I not help thee?" Venceslas asked laughingly, supposing his favorite to be in debt.

"Impossible, sire. No man, not even Your Majesty's self, can help me. I am to be married!"

"Truly I would prevent it if I could. Though I doubt not it will be more lamentable for the future Countess than for thee. What, is she ugly then, that thou makest such a mien?"

"No, sire—as lovely as an angel!"

"Why, then—is she stupid?"

"Nay, she is clever; and as subtle, I should conceive, as any doctor at the University."

"As poor, then, as a church-mouse?"

"She will bring me a great inheritance."

"Why, then I cannot understand thee," said the King, shrugging his shoulders.

"She is enchanting, but cold, and she loves not me. Aye, and I love her not, for her indifference to me offends me too sorely."

"The devil! Why, thy bride is squeamish if such a

pretty fellow suit her not. Who is she, and why does she wed thee if she love thee not?"

"She is Rugena Rabstein, only daughter to Baron Rabstein, long since deceased. We were betrothed for family considerations in our childhood."

Venceslas frowned.

"Baron Rabstein? The friend of Rosenberg? I have but an ungracious recollection of him. He was an unworthy rebel!"

"Sire! For nine years Rugena hath been brought up in our house, and that alone should serve as a pledge of her respect and steadfast fidelity to Your Majesty's person. I hope for your gracious permission to present my bride to the Queen."

"Willingly do I permit it! When is thy marriage?"

"I cannot say with certainty. My mother is now in Bologna, and only when she returns will she herself bring Rugena to Prague."

"If I am in town then I will come to thy wedding. And with regard to love be not dismayed. The bride may be cold, but the wife will be full of fire. There is much difference between the one position and the other."

"A vast difference, in truth! 'Till we have crossed the church portal she may command, and I will suffer her to step upon me as upon a worm. But afterwards I will command, and I will richly repay her for her audacity in presuming not to love me," said Vok, laughing.

The King applauded him, and with much jesting and laughter they began to play.

Venceslas was in high spirits, and the sound of his ringing laugh was heard every moment, even in the rooms adjoining. The young Count amused him with unflagging humor, regaling him with anecdotes and tales of adventure worthy of Boccaccio himself.

On the evening of the same day Vok had a short meeting with Lobkovitz, who confirmed the news of the King's decree; and they despatched a messenger to Hus without delay.

X

THE Countess Waldstein returned from Bologna much sooner than she had expected. She was in such haste to get to Prague that before reaching Rabstein she sent news of her approaching arrival so that there remained for Rugena only just enough time for the packing of her things.

On a dark, foggy day at the end of February the Countess arrived with Rugena in Prague. She, with her future daughter-in-law, occupied one litter, Anna with Itka a second, while Father Ilarius rode on horseback beside Matthias, who was in command of the guard. Not far from the gates of the city they were met by Count Ginek and his son at the head of a company of men-at-arms. The Count announced that disorders in the town had prompted him and Vok to come to meet them, and accompany them to the house. And indeed Prague was in an unusually restless condition.

In spite of the darkness of the night, which generally drove peaceful citizens from the unlit, narrow streets, which were the haunts of night-thieves, brigands, and other evil people, there were crowds of German students on every hand. They strolled noisily about, with torches in their hands, casting inimical glances, or even abusive words, at every Bohemian they chanced to meet.

The Count rode with his son beside the litter. Rugena and the Countess dropped their veils over their faces; but whenever they passed a lighted house or the flare of torches the young girl cast a curious and tremulous glance at her future bridegroom.

Vok had changed and grown still handsomer in the two years during which she had not seen him.

He had acquired a manly figure, and his face breathed energy and youthful assurance. The disdainful smile which never left his lips revealed his white and perfectly-shaped teeth. He wore a light helmet without a vizor, and was entirely enveloped in a long dark cloak. His big black eyes also cast frequent glances into the interior of the litter where his betrothed was sitting now entirely hidden by an impenetrable veil. The darkness had prevented him from seeing Rugena at meeting, and he had perforce to be content with a kiss on her little hand in its silk, fur-lined glove. Their way was often barred by groups of students or townsmen, who by cries and oaths sought to detain them; but on each occasion a demonstration on the part of the numerous armed escort inspired the crowd with a becoming respect and cleared the road for the travelers.

At length they reached the Waldsteins' house, a huge, gloomy building, with towers on either side. The procession entered the courtyard through a wide iron-work gate, strongly guarded. Vok leapt from his horse and was about to lead his betrothed into the house when Rugena, without lifting her veil, passed her arm through

that of Anna and entered with her, merely greeting her bridegroom with the words:

"I bid you farewell until supper-time."

The vexation she read on his face amused her.

The young Count, thus abandoned, went to his mother's room, where he remained until supper-time conversing with her about the journey and the various items of news she had learnt in Italy. Among other things the Countess told her son that she had brought thence many beautiful things which he might offer to his bride as wedding gifts.

"I bought them very cheaply, thanks to my cousin Thomas, who has had vast experience in such matters."

"Not in vain is he a bishop!" Vok remarked ironically. "But where are these things? I should much like to inspect them."

"I will show them thee directly. They lie apart, in a special trunk," the Countess answered hastily, seeming unable to remove her gaze from her son, delightedly following every movement of his handsome form.

"Nay, better delay the inspection till to-morrow. Thou art tired, and they will soon summon us to supper," he said, in a somewhat disturbed manner. Rising, he hastened to the dining-room.

Rugena entered almost at the same moment.

She had changed her attire. Her wide-sleeved dress of lilac silk clung close about her graceful figure. Her wondrous golden hair, gleaming bright against the dark background, framed her pale and agitated face with a

shining aureole. Her big eyes, that now looked almost black, gazed in a shy and frightened manner at the young Count, who had stopped as though spellbound in the doorway.

It was difficult to recognize in Rugena, standing before him now in her brilliant beauty, that pale thin girl of fifteen, looking almost sickly because of the quickness of her growth, to whom he had bidden farewell two years before.

"Rugena! Is it thee or some heavenly vision?" he exclaimed, with such sincere rapture that Rugena blushed and grew shamefaced. The Count and Countess, who entered at that moment, laughed at such embarrassment.

"Embrace her, then, and convince thyself that it is not a vision thou beholdest!" his father cried to him merrily.

Vok did not await a second command, but followed his father's directions, embracing his betrothed and kissing her passionately. Rugena made no opposition, only hanging her head in confusion, and afterwards allowed him to lead her to the table, where she was placed by his side.

The old Count, in order to enliven the company at the dining-table, began a conversation with his wife and son, and in the meantime Rugena recovered from her embarrassment and began to look about her.

"Tell me, Uncle Ginek," she said suddenly, "what is going forward in Prague? There seems to be an insurrection in the town! Thou didst thyself say that it was unquiet here, and that therefore thou camest with Vok

to meet us. Why are the people so unrestful, the students especially?"

"In truth, neither thou nor Yana can yet have heard the great news!" said the Count, and began to tell them the story of the King's decree bestowing three votes on the Bohemians.

"The Germans are beside themselves with rage since its proclamation," he continued. "They besiege the King with protests and complainings, and pester him with deputations; and since nothing hath availed, they dare resort to threats. Three nationalities gathered in conference on the 16th, and all magisters and students took solemn oath to quit Prague if the decree were not withdrawn."

"Yet if they in truth fulfil this oath it will be a great loss for the town," remarked the Countess. "For think, only, how many thousand German professors, students, and masters are dwelling here; how many parchment-makers, copyists, bookbinders, and so forth are fed by the University. They will of course all follow those who leave."

"Ah! but the living interests of the Bohemians must not be sacrificed to the comfort of transcribers and bookbinders," Vok exclaimed angrily. "If they go the more bread will be left for others! Praise God, the University will not perish for want of German professors! Aye, and be sure they will not go! They hope but to affright us and force the King to accede to their demands. The fools! They imagine that such measures will have the

same success here as in Bologna, from whence the students and professors withdrew to Sienna when the University deemed itself affronted by the town. The people of Bologna ran after them to fetch them back. But things are different here, and their threats will not have the desired effect, be sure!"

The ladies being very fatigued by their journey, the company separated soon after supper.

Next morning the Countess was still busied with servants in the arrangement of her things when Vok came in and asked to see the presents destined for Rugena.

"For such a bride as my Rugena nothing can be too good! Heavens, how beautiful she is! I tell thee, mother, the whole court will envy me," Vok said proudly.

"Yes, she is beautiful; too beautiful, I fear me, to bring thee happiness," said the Countess, shaking her head. "Seest thou, my child, women of such rare beauty awaken many passions and cause no few griefs and vexations to their husbands. God grant Rugena be wise enough to love thee as thou dost deserve. Look you, this material is for her wedding-gown. It might well awaken the desire of any maid to don it the more speedily. What sayest thou?"

She unwound a length of white brocade wonderfully embroidered with arabesque and silver flowers.

The material was so thick and solid that it stood alone and rustled at the slightest movement.

"'Tis ravishing indeed, and Rugena must needs admire it! I thank thee, mother!"

"And here is the adornment for her head," the Countess continued, carefully extracting from a box a silver fillet finely worked and set with pearls and brilliants, to which was attached a veil of silver gauze.

" 'Tis fit for a Queen! Where hast thou found such marvels, mother? In sooth the Venetian merchants must have left thee with an empty purse!"

"Such treasures must of needs cost dear. Yet I acquired them at a moderate cheapness. My cousin Thomas had brought them for a relative who was to have been married. But the bridegroom was slain in duel, and the bride entered a nunnery, so that these things were cast upon the Bishop's hand, and he let me have them."

After dinner, Vok, longing to be alone with his betrothed, begged her to go with him into a room adjoining to see the wedding presents he had brought her.

On entering the room Rugena's eyes began to seek with curiosity for the promised gifts. Used as she was to every sort of luxury, a cry of ecstasy broke from her lips at sight of the beautiful silver circlet and the brocade spread along the table. She examined the costly fabric, turning it about with childish joy.

"This dress shalt thou don on the day when thou art mine forever," whispered Vok into her ear, and lifting the bridal veil he placed it upon her head and drew her to the Venetian mirror which hung upon the wall.

The fillet glowing with jewels, and the long white veil which enveloped Rugena in a silvery mist, made her look so beautiful that even she herself could not refrain from

admiring the enchanting image in the glass. Vok, literally blinded by her loveliness, drew her towards him and embraced her.

"Thou art so superb, my Rugena, that a saint would be tempted at sight of thee! I shall count not only the days but the hours to our wedding!" he whispered, kissing her.

Rugena turned to him, and meeting his passionate, devouring glance, flushed and trembled, hiding her eyes with her hands.

"Look not at me so! It is terrible to me! Thou hast never looked like that before," she murmured, turning pale.

"Foolish little one!" said Vok, half laughing, half offended. "Thou wast but a little girl before, whom I knew for my betrothed but loved not. Of a certainty I wish not to frighten thee; but I wish with all my soul to win thy heart. Thou canst not ask that I should hide my feelings."

He seated her on a red velvet bench, and bent over her.

"Tell me, Rugena, dost thou love me even though a little? Since yesterday thou hast not paid me back one kiss."

Rugena lifted her head and her pure eyes looked straight into those of her bridegroom as though they would search his very soul.

"I am very desirous to love thee, Vok. I have no one in the world to love me, whom I may love. But dost thou really love me? Or is it but admiration thou feelest for

me? They tell me I am beautiful, but beauty is a frail gift. Dost thou not understand, I love thee not as yet because I know thee little. Thou art handsome and attractive, and if thy soul doth but answer thine exterior, if I can but esteem it as wholly as I acknowledge thy beauty, then . . . I will give my whole heart to thee. Then, be thou beautiful or ugly, sick or in good health, even crippled or blind, I will love thee till death, so long as thy heart doth beat for me."

The Count listened, bewildered, to these solemn words, spoken with so much emotion by the rosy lips of the being he adored; and suddenly his heart contracted with dismay. Light-minded as he was, caressed by women and their easy victor, he realized that now a deep and lasting sentiment was being demanded of him—in a word, love, whose true meaning he had never known. The very knowledge of this expectation seemed irksome to him.

"I will try, Rugena, to deserve thy love and gain thy heart," he murmured irresolutely.

"I will accept thy word, and may God send us happiness!"

She took his head between her hands and kissed him on the forehead. Then she fluttered from the room like a frightened bird.

XI

RUGENA'S wedding was to take place in April, immediately after Easter. As gaieties of any kind were for the most part forbidden during Lent she led a more or less secluded life, although she was presented at Court when the King arrived in Prague.

Venceslas was struck with Rugena's beauty, and his reception was therefore gracious, while good Queen Sophia, greatly interested, behaved as with maternal affection, and admitted the girl to her most intimate circle. She often took Rugena on Sundays and holidays to the Bethlehem Chapel to hear the preaching of her confessor, John Hus.

Rugena grew daily more delighted and impressed by this fearless servant of God, choosing him as her confessor, and bestowing her entire confidence upon him. She eagerly followed every word of the preacher, as with burning faith he expounded the word of Christ, presenting it in its convincing clearness and deep significance; or as he condemned the vanity of those who, instead of promulgating the Holy Scriptures, plunged themselves into senseless controversies. Such evil priests, he said, sought, not the blessings of Christianity, but their own advancement, or the indulgence of their passions. With

enthusiasm Hus depicted the figure of the true priest, as he should be: chaste, disinterested, mild, self-sacrificing, and filled with love as the Heavenly Teacher Himself had been. Sternly he compared this ideal with the priesthood as it was: greedy, pugnacious, swelled with pride, consumed with every kind of vice, daring in holy vestments to consummate God's sacraments with hands stained by blood and plunder.

But while those who truly sought for good and thirsted to hear the pure words of the Gospel filled the Bethlehem Chapel and overflowed in crowds into the streets—others who felt the words of the preacher to be applicable to themselves, and saw their vices laid bare by him, were filled with resentment and an increasing hatred.

Thanks to favorable circumstances the preacher of the Bethlehem Chapel occupied a quite exceptional position, the importance of which he alone with his sincere humility had failed to recognize.

His friends and admirers in all grades of society numbered thousands; but the number of his enemies was also growing, and the members of the higher priesthood gazed with envy at the modest servant of the altar, whom knowledge and worth alone had placed at the head of the Bohemian Church.

As her wedding-day drew nearer Rugena grew increasingly thoughtful and silent. She seemed disturbed by some troublesome presentiment. The memory of her father's love for her was still preserved in her tender heart; while in her guardian's family she always felt

alone. Anna and Svietomir were the nearest to her, but even for them she felt no more than a calm, sisterly attachment.

She yearned for the love of the man to whom she was to be forever united. She was not content with the knightly courtesy of Vok, the presents he lavished upon her, or even the passion he expressed. Rugena, with her serious, observant, and penetrating mind, was well aware that her betrothed's amusing sallies reflected but the customary chatter of the Court gallants, and that his protestations of love were but the outcome of boisterousness and the intoxication of passion.

Eagerly she sought in Vok's eyes the spark of that warm and pure affection for which she thirsted, and in his voice those notes straight from the heart which would have united them forever by an ardent and unfailing sentiment.

On the eve of her wedding Rugena was conscious of peculiar anguish in her heart. She was seized by an undefinable longing to pour forth her soul, to seek some aid and counsel that might strengthen and direct her in her dark and unknown future.

Never had she felt so bitterly until this moment that she was an orphan, lacking not only father and mother but any near friend to whom she might reveal her heart. She thought of Hus.

He was her spiritual father, a friend known to her from childhood, whose purity, wisdom, and benevolence inspired her with full confidence.

The wedding was to take place in the church of St. Michael, and the officiating priest was to be Hus.

Though she had but that morning confessed and received communion, Rugena sent a letter to her confessor, begging him to come to pass an hour with her in conversation. Receiving an answer from him consenting to her request, Rugena retired into her oratory, ordering that Hus should be conducted thither as soon as he arrived.

The eve of the wedding was, according to custom, celebrated by a festive gathering of young people and by games. But Rugena expressed the desire to spend the last hours of her girlhood in solitude and reflection.

Entering her oratory she fell upon her knees before the shrine and became engrossed in prayer. She did not hear the opening of the door or the entry of Hus who stopped short upon the threshold. He gazed for long at her, and an indefinable expression flitted across his face. Then he approached and touched her hand. Rugena trembled and rose to her feet.

"You wished to see me, my child? Did you forget some sin at your confession, or simply desire to seek my counsel?" asked Hus, seating himself in the armchair near the shrine.

"I have no sin on my conscience, Father John, except perhaps the doubts by which I have been visited. I have no mother, and to you alone I can speak without reserve, seeking your counsel. I have ventured thus to disturb you because to-night I am oppressed by apprehension and alarm."

"Speak! I pray God may school me to calm you, and disperse your doubts."

Rugena was thoughtful for a moment, and then began speaking in a low voice.

"To-morrow I must swear fidelity and love to Vok for all my life, and yet I do not love him as I should."

Hus started.

"You do not love the Count? But why?" he asked, amazed, pausing between his words.

"I did not wish thus to speak, Father John! Yet methinks love might be different—both on his side and mine. . . ."

As quickly and clearly as possible she strove to explain that feeling which was disturbing her, adding: "They say that love is a mighty feeling, all-suffering and all-forgiving. Yet I know that I could suffer no offense from Vok, that I could not forgive him, but should cease only to love him if he offended me. And he would, methinks, act towards me in the like manner."

Hus thoughtfully shook his head.

"My daughter, I like not the feelings with which you are preparing to approach God's altar. The oath which to-morrow you will take of your own free will doth oblige you to share grief and joy with your husband and unfailingly to offer him a devotion that shall forgive all, and judge with leniency. You will take a great duty upon yourself to-morrow! Fate has in store for you, as for all other women, more than one trial. But though the wife's heart be visited by disappointment, another,

a new and lasting love will blossom for her by the cradle of her child. As yet you know not life, Rugena; no passion hath yet disturbed your calm. But when your soul shall awaken, when pride, jealousy, anger, temptation shall whisper their evil counsels to you, then must you cling to virtue, to duty, and to faith. All that is easy if you can but love! And why, my daughter, should you not strive to gain that great love that doth melt hearts and make all sacrifices easy? The Count, like all of us, is subject to human weaknesses, yet he is worthy of your love; and God hath endowed you with that powerful instrument, your beauty, to attract him to you. Make use of this divine gift, my daughter, not for displays of empty vanities, but to exercise a salutary influence upon your husband that shall ennoble him and make of him a man of piety and stern morality."

Rugena was deeply moved and big tears trickled down her cheeks.

"I understand that this duty is great and sacred, yet . . . yet . . . I fear that I lack strength wherewith to fulfil it," she faltered, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"Life, my child, is a struggle which God doth send to be a blessing to us, and which good will doth help us to maintain. When heavy hours and weak moments shall befall thee, communicate thy grief to me, and Our Lord Jesus Christ, who knoweth human frailty, shall suffer me to point thee out the path of righteousness."

Placing his hands upon Rugena's downcast head he prayed fervently.

"And now," he said, with his kindly smile, "calm yourself, and remember that not one hair falls from our heads without the knowledge of our Heavenly Father."

He was about to rise, but Rugena clasped his hand, restraining him.

"I thank you, dear Father John, for your instruction," she said, looking at him almost childishly, her clear eyes still moist with tears. "Kiss me now, as you were wont to do when I was little, and I shall know that through your pure lips my dear father sends me from Heaven his blessing for my wedding-day."

"Willingly, my child," said Hus, and bending over her, kissed her forehead, giving her his blessing. Her doubts relieved, Rugena rose joyfully to her feet.

Night fell, and the little lamp burning before the Crucifix cast a glimmering light in the preacher's cell. He lay upon his hard and narrow bed, but could not sleep. Alarming fancies were distressing him.

The thoughts and feelings which now assailed Father John, and which during the whole evening had prevented him from working were guests unknown in this peaceful asylum of the scholarly hermit.

The image of a woman was haunting him with an unnatural persistency. Rugena's curly golden head, and her large, bright eyes gazing with naïve trustfulness into

his own, had floated like a seductive vision across the pages of the dry theological tract, had smiled upon him from the pages of the volume on which he was at work, and distracted his attention during the evening prayer.

With a heavy head and anxious heart he lay down to rest, ignorant of what had befallen him.

He had in the course of his life passed indifferently by numbers of women, young and beautiful. Neither beauty nor the adoration which many had professed for him had touched his heart or thrilled his senses. Impure desires which had been the ruin of too many of his fellow priests, impelling them even to the seduction of fair penitents who visited the confessional, had left him untouched. Chaste by nature, he had led a strict and strenuous life, consecrated to science and prayer; and the flesh, thus conquered, had never discomposed him.

But the evening's interview with Rugena had finally cast his soul into dismay. The image of her upon her knees, pure, fair, and as fresh as a field-flower, haunted him like a pursuing vision. He fancied he still felt the clasp of her soft white hand, and still inhaled the delicate fragrance wafted from her hair when he bent to kiss her forehead. At these remembrances his heart contracted painfully, and a cold sweat broke out upon his brow. And on the next day he was to unite her to a hare-brained fellow who probably would never understand what a treasure fate had bestowed upon him! Oh, why could he not consecrate her to God while her innocent soul was still undefiled by contact with a frivolous and

depraved society, while passion and jealousy were still unknown to her, while she was still uncontaminated by the sins, into which the idle hangers-on at Court, inflamed by her beauty, would seek to lead her? His heart grew still heavier, and a deep groan broke from his breast.

He sprang from his couch and fell on his knees before the Crucifix, raising his tightly clenched hands to Heaven.

"Jesus, Merciful Savior!" he cried, beseechingly. "Crush this demon which torments me, which hath assumed the image of a guiltless child. Drive from me these unclean thoughts, that I may not blush, serving Thine altar with the stains of sinful imaginings upon my soul. Sustain me, O Lord, in this hour of struggle which hath revealed my weakness unto me while I thought myself to be strong! Give me strength to be a priest according to Thy law, and cleanse my heart from fleshly appetites."

"Thee, Thee *alone* and my duty have I the right to love! The one aim of my life is to preach Thy Holy Word, to struggle with delusion and iniquity, to open the eyes of the blind and lead the repentant to Thy footstool. Oh, Jesus, if my prayer reach to Thy throne send me some token to sustain me in mine infirmity. . . ."

Little by little he was dominated by a profound ecstasy. Sunk in a swoon of passionate adoration of his Heavenly Teacher, with his eyes fixed upon the figure of the Crucified, he lost all consciousness of his surroundings.

Then suddenly it seemed to him that a spark began to glow above the head of the Savior, that it was joined by another, and that soon a fiery sheaf streamed forth, which

grew broader and enveloped him, while at length he was seized and uplifted above an abyss of fearful gloom by a cloud of flame.

Wrapped in the flames he felt unutterable bliss. Some heavy weight fell from him, and his soul was bathed in deep tranquillity so that it no longer was troubled by earthly longings. Light was in him and around him; while beneath him, very far below, in a dim, whitish mist, swarmed a crowd of frantic people, in crown, tiaras and miters, with distorted faces upon which traces of all earthly passions were imprinted.

With curses and execrations they flung mud and stones at him, striving to strike him within his fiery halo. But he felt himself in safety, and in his heart was no shade of resentment against his powerless enemies.

He floated far in the brilliant, pellucid atmosphere. The ravine disappeared in the distance, and the wild, discordant shrieks of the crowd melted into harmonies of indescribable tenderness. Suddenly, in a blinding light, appeared a shining figure, in snow-white raiment with azure wings and a green palm-branch in its hand. The spirit had Rugena's features and her golden curls, but in its serene gaze there was nothing earthly.

"All hail, thou valiant warrior!" said the heavenly apparition. "See, where thy lying and perfidious enemies have vanished into the abyss, and instead of destroying thee have rendered thee immortal! Upon the tables of the history of peoples, stained with blood and crime, the name of him who was courageous to proclaim God's

Word, to censure the trangressions of those high placed on earth, and to die for his convictions, will be inscribed in letters of fire. All frailties of the flesh will be consumed like a hair in the flames encircling thee, and thy name shall shine forth like a star in the memory of the Bohemian people, a star leading them on to truth and freedom. . . ."

The rising sun, peeping in at the tiny, lead-encircled window of Hus's cell, revealed him lying on the floor at the foot of the Crucifix, but his face, emaciated from work and with long sleepless nights, looked calm and restful. When the first ray of sunlight fell upon him he trembled and drew himself together. Then, rising to his feet, he sat down at the table and buried his face in his hands.

He felt exhausted, but his soul was bright. God had heard his prayer and the torturing dreams had fled. But had he slumbered or beheld a vision? Was it possible that God had reserved him for that exalted mission, to serve as an example to his people, a mission to be crowned by an illustrious death? In his meekness and humility the thought of such a glorious destiny struck awe into his soul.

"Be Thy will done in all things, and I will bless Thee for whatever fate awaits me," he murmured, crossing himself. "Thou hast inclined unto my prayer, O Lord, and expelled the mischief. Of Thy mercy now preserve me from the demon of Pride."

Soon after midday an enormous crowd gathered around the church of St. Michael, while within the building was

assembled the flower of the nobility and gentry of Prague.

The streets through which the bridal procession was to pass were thronged with sight-seers, for the King and Queen had promised to grace the marriage of young Count Waldstein by their presence.

Cries from the street proclaimed the arrival of the royal cortège, and a short while afterwards the bride and bridegroom entered.

Beautiful as a dream, yet pale as the silvery veil enveloping her in filmy mist, Rugena moved with downcast head. Only when she reached the altar she raised her eyes and looked at Hus, standing before her on the steps.

He also was pale, for he had taken no food since the day before. A strict fast must be employed to crush and subdue the riotous flesh which had dared to oppose his iron will.

Solemnly, and with deep feeling, he conducted the service; and from the bottom of his heart invoked Heaven's blessing on the newly-wed.

The triumphant victory he had gained over his own weakness resounded in the words with which he addressed the youthful pair, exhorting them to love one another faithfully, to live according to God's Word, remembering that only the fulfilment of duty can impart real happiness and tranquillity of conscience.

Even upon Vok, light-minded though he was, the words of the preacher, delivered with extraordinary force, had their effect, though they awakened unpleasant feelings in his soul. He loved his bride, and his resolves were strong

and deep; but the notion that it was now his duty to remain exclusively faithful to Rugena, lovely though she was, was extremely disconcerting, and, in his opinion, it was superfluous for Hus to make such demands upon the newly married.

Not once did Jerome remove his eyes from Rugena during the ceremony. It seemed to him that he had never seen a woman so enchanting, or one who was such a complete incarnation of the ideal of maiden purity and innocence. He strove to renew his acquaintance with her, but the crowd pressing around the young couple hindered his approach, and only at the Waldsteins' house, before the guests sat down to table, was he enabled to ask Vok to present him to the bride.

The Queen had kept Rugena by her side nearly all the time, but at that minute the Countess Waldstein had replaced her, when her husband led Jerome across the room.

"Allow me, Rugena," he said merrily, "to present to thee Jerome, the most sarcastic and seductive man in all Bohemia!"

"You seek to flatter me by your elaborate eulogy, Count. But I prefer to present myself as an old acquaintance to the Countess," answered Jerome with a deep bow. "I had the happiness of seeing you, a child, Countess, in your castle at Rabstein, where you gave shelter to Hus and myself. Doubtless you have forgotten me, but I have retained a clear remembrance of a little fairy. . . ."

At sight of Jerome Rugena's face grew deadly white, and she looked distractedly at the stately figure of the famous orator, bowing with innate elegance before her, and pressing his lips to her cold hand. But she conquered herself, answering in a low voice:

"I too remember seeing you before. It was when I received the news of my father's death, and all the details of that fearful day are deeply graven on my memory."

Vok had departed to some other guests, not noticing Rugena's agitation, while Jerome attached no significance to it. Conversing with her for a short time with his customary wit and brilliance he stood aside, as the guests were now preparing to sit down to table.

Rugena was completely overwhelmed. The meeting with Jerome had cast her soul into a turmoil. The ideal of her childish dreams had suddenly appeared before her in the flesh, and had lost nothing by nearer acquaintance.

Jerome was, in fact, one of the handsomest men of his time, and the most dashing cavalier in Prague, a city surpassing in luxury all other cities of the epoch. Daring, alluring, highly gifted and learned, he was famous, not only in his own country, but in the whole of Europe, where he was always attended by unfailing success. He seemed created to enslave the hearts of women. Even his sworn enemies succumbed to his fascination.

And this ideal of manhood, whom she already adored not even knowing him, and by whose side Vok seemed entirely insignificant, Rugena was fated to meet upon her wedding-day!

She knew that the unruly thoughts which wandered through her mind were sinful, a betrayal of the oath of fidelity which she had given, that it was her duty to banish them from her heart, and to regard Jerome as nothing but her husband's friend. But notwithstanding this wise resolve she could not keep her eyes from wandering to his face, as he animatedly proposed one toast after another and amused the king to tears by his wit and merriment.

After the banquet the royal couple with their suite retired to the Palace; but the remaining guests continued to feast, to the annoyance of Rugena who felt imperative need for rest and quiet. Pale and thoughtful, she had taken little part in the conversation at the table. Vok, on the contrary, was in excellent spirits. The universal admiration for Rugena, and the innumerable congratulations he had received, were extremely flattering to his self-esteem.

The wine-cups circulated again, and more toasts were drunk to the heroes of the day. Then, to the sound of flutes and singing, with little pages strewing flowers before their feet, the young couple were solemnly conducted to the bridal chamber.

PART II

PART II

I

(Ezek. xxxvii.)

"Prophet, arise, and let us live!
And let hearts beat, let eyes behold,
And let the breath of life stream forth
And sweep across the desert cold. . . ."

N. Sokolof.

The first months of marriage passed for Rugena like a dream, between celebrations in honor of the newly-wed couple, and the political unrest which had seized the population of Prague.

The question of votes in the University had become acute; and it reached its culminating point with the election of the new Rector and the Dean of the Faculty of Science. The Germans, with characteristic stubbornness, clung to the old order of things; but the Bohemians opposed the unjust system of voting, and they triumphed. The elections were postponed, and Baltenhagen, like Wahrentrappe, remained for the time in his former post.

The affair was only prevented from leading to hand-to-hand fighting by the strict injunction of King Venceslas; but relations between the antagonistic parties were strained to the utmost.

The tempest, which for so long had been hanging in the air, broke forth on the 7th of May, 1409.

In order to put an end to the disorders in the University, the King on his own authority appointed as Rector his secretary, Zdenka Dubov, while Simon Tishnov was made Dean, and Nicholas Lobkovitz entrusted with the power of putting the King's decree into effect.

Lobkovitz, a great friend of the Waldsteins, was supping with them one evening, and laughingly related the results of the duty laid upon him.

"At the King's order I summoned the masters of all four nationalities to Carolinum, and myself repaired to the Old Place (town) in company with an adviser, provided with a considerable guard for the purpose of keeping wranglers in order. When I proposed to the Germans that they should submit to the will of the King they flatly refused; and what was their dismay when I took from Baltenhagen the Rector's seal and *matricula* of the University, and the keys of the treasury and library, and conferred the posts of Rector and Deacon on Zdenka and Simon. I thought they would have burst with rage. But the Germans are thick-skinned; they confined themselves to shouts and curses," Lobkovitz concluded with a smile.

" 'Twill be curious to see what they will do now. The Germans cannot resist much longer, and yet I do not believe that they will fulfil their oath to leave the town," remarked the elder Waldstein.

But the next day proved that the Germans were serious

in their intention. All over the town they were making feverish and hasty preparations for their departure.

On the third day at dawn an unusual noise and bustle reigned in the streets of Prague. One might have thought that the whole population was deserting the city.

The German professors and students were departing, their faces gloomy and preoccupied, some on horseback, some in carriages, and others simply on foot. After them followed a long line of tradesmen, with their wives and children, the latter distributed among the carts and wagons loaded with baggage. It was a veritable exodus. More than five thousand people (some chronicles say twenty thousand) left Prague that day.

A bewildered crowd gazed in silence at those who were departing. Until that moment nobody had seriously believed in the German threat. The sweets of victory were poisoned for many by the fear of inevitable financial losses; but we must do the Bohemians the justice of saying that they bore the temporary disadvantages of the position courageously, considering their national interests to be of greater importance.

At the first University elections after the departure of the Germans John Hus was chosen Rector.

It would have seemed natural, after such a signal victory, for peace to be proclaimed; but instead, the struggle was but diverted into theological channels, and maintained as furiously as before.

The disputes between the partisans of Wycliffe and reform, and those of the Church hierarchy and Papal ab-

solutism passed from the halls of the University into the ranks of the people and divided the whole population into two inimical camps. In the Palace and in the castles of the nobility, in shops and workshops, in street conversations and in sermons, two topics reigned supreme—the works of Wycliffe, and the imperative necessity of reforming the Church, in which scandal had already reached its climax with the election of a *third* Pope, Alexander V.

Though the masses of the people may not have quite understood the scholastic subtleties of the English philosopher's teachings they knew very well that upon the side of Church-reform were ranged the noblest people, famed not only for their virtue but for love of their fatherland; while their opponents—the wealthy and vicious priesthood—were for the most part Germans, and therefore inveterate enemies of the Bohemian people.

These arguments and dissensions increasing in acuteness found an echo in the house of the Waldsteins, which was visited not only by Hus and Jerome, but by a number of other friends, members partly of the priesthood and partly of the University.

Meanwhile, while the political and religious life of Bohemia was being confronted by a new crisis which was to lead inevitably to the Hussite wars, a situation no less intricate was being evolved in Rugena's spiritual life.

In the early days of her marriage she had felt stunned. She was, at first, terrified by the ardent passion of her young husband, but after a time resigned herself to it,

as to a necessary evil, and bore it with indifference, seeking her entertainment in the society of Jerome. His constant visits had sustained in her that vague feeling with which he had inspired her long ago, but which she had never imagined to be love. If anybody, indeed, had suggested such a thing to her she would have been deeply offended. Rugena was sincerely convinced that she delighted in Jerome's society merely because he was distinguished from other men by his beauty, intelligence, and learning.

A passing joy was afforded her by a letter from Svietomir, brought by Zizka when he returned from Poland.

The youth wrote that the Cracow castellan had taken a great interest in him, and had introduced him to the Court. He was pleased with his position and had zealously applied himself to the learning of the knightly arts.

The first love adventure of the young Count after their marriage unexpectedly changed Rugena's spiritual attitude. Vok had always considered that strict adherence to the marriage-vow was a task beyond him. Besides which, however much in love he might be with his beautiful wife, he could not help remarking her coldness to him, and partly through anger restrained himself still less. His absences from home grew more prolonged, and Rugena, who often visited the Court through mere tedium, soon learned from a compassionate friend that the constant preoccupations and journeys of Vok were caused by nothing less than love intrigues which he was maintaining with two ladies at once. This discovery

roused in Rugena's heart an utterly new and unknown feeling. She was a woman now, and the knowledge that she was being betrayed for wanton creatures who could not be compared to her in beauty was a deadly offense to her.

She unrestrainedly visited her scorn and indignation upon her husband. Stormy scenes followed, and Vok, moved by the recklessness of his nature, and purely as a mockery of his wife, began to take an open part in all sorts of notorious escapades.

The coolness between husband and wife became obvious, and attracted to Rugena's side numberless adorers. These hoped to profit by her wrath against her husband, but they were speedily disillusioned. The fame of the young Countess Waldstein's impregnability spread in the town.

The only attentions gladly received by her were those of Jerome, and that was merely because he never exceeded the bounds of respectful courtesy, though he loved Rugena more sincerely than others, being attracted not only by her beauty but by her intelligence as well. He had no notion of the part he played in her heart and imagination; nor had he any desire to risk the loss of her friendship by a rash and hopeless declaration of love.

The month of July, 1410, arrived. A new act of religious intolerance was being prepared, the ostensible excuse for which was the teaching of Wycliffe, its real occasion being the rebellion of free human thought against the oppression of the Church of Rome.

No man can stand higher than the crowd without arousing the envy and hatred of the mediocrities surrounding him. Hus fell a victim to this law, and the enemies who surged about him sought out the most dangerous and efficacious weapons, with intent to work his ruin.

Protected by the King and Queen, adored by the people, and possessing an untarnished fame, Hus seemed to defy all such intrigues. Yet he was defenseless against the accusation of heresy. It was at this weak spot that the attack against him was directed, and many people whom he had considered his friends appeared now in the ranks of his most malignant enemies—among them Stephen Paleck and Stanislav of Znoima.

The teachings of Wycliffe were pronounced heretical, and all those who possessed his books were ordered by the Archbishop of Prague to bring them to his palace.

This irrational measure aroused the discontent of all partisans of reform, and was of course utterly condemned in the Waldsteins' house. Father Ilarius persistently endeavored to uphold the Archbishop's authority, but always met with resistance on the part of Jerome.

Learned and gifted as he was, Jerome would not at first descend to arguing with an ignoramus like Father Ilarius. But noticing on one occasion that a dispute between them diverted Rugena, he changed his tactics and began involving the priest in all manner of scholarly controversies. The dull-witted Ilarius was entirely incapable of parrying the attacks of his brilliant opponent; and Jerome never released him until he was help-

less with rage, to the intense enjoyment of the young Countess.

But after a time Ilarius suddenly began to be impertinent, and the change in him took place when the news was received that Alexander's successor upon the papal throne was none other than Baldassare Cossa. This aggrandizement of her near relation was a source of indescribable joy to the Countess Waldstein, and Ilarius began to conduct himself with unconcealed disdain towards Hus and his followers.

On July 16th Hus and Jerome were to dine at the Waldsteins', but arrived somewhat earlier for the purpose of discussing current affairs. The guests and their hosts were sitting, conversing, in a room overlooking the street, when suddenly their attention was arrested by the stroke of a bell, and afterwards came an ominous protracted tolling, like that of a funeral-bell which seemed to resound all over Prague.

"What means this?" said Jerome, springing to his feet.

Vok rushed to the window and threw it open. The passers-by in the street had stopped, and were gathering in groups; but nothing further was to be observed.

"We must go and discover what hath occurred," said those present, buckling on their swords.

But at that moment the door opened and Father Ilarius appeared upon the threshold, his face flushed and beaming, and his eyes shining with delight.

"Do not trouble to go forth, good sirs! I will explain to you what hath happened! That sound is the funeral-

knell of heresy which hath infected Prague. At this moment the accursed words of Wycliffe are ablaze in the Archbishop's courtyard. May the impious soul of the heretic burn even thus in Hell!"

Hus gave a low cry, and Jerome said angrily:

"Thou liest, monk! 'Tis impossible!"

"Ha-ha-ha!" tittered Ilarius. "Soon you will be convinced of the truth. The Archbishop's palace is now surrounded by guards. And Zbynek doth himself supervise the deed which hath been authorized by the Holy Father."

"An Antichrist is he—thy Holy Father! A robber who hath purchased for himself a miter. How dare he burn works of philosophy which neither he nor his priests can understand!"

"The Holy Father an Antichrist? A robber? He, who can bind and loosen souls in Heaven and on earth! Not dare to burn the works of a heretic!" Ilarius cried furiously.

"Yes, an Antichrist! Not souls but purses doth he bind and loosen!" Jerome said wrathfully.

"Ah! I see, thou too art a heretic, like thine accomplice John, who doth inspire thee to the like revilement of the representative of Christ! He will teach you, scoffers, to respect his power. He will send you both to the stake, which you have richly merited."

He flung himself with upraised fist upon Jerome, who at this final insult also lost all self-control.

Turning the blow aside with the handle of his sword he

seized the monk, raised him in the air and flung him through the open window near which he stood, with the words:

"There! I will teach thee to insult an honorable man whose shoes thou art not worthy to unlace!"

All this had happened so quickly and unexpectedly that Hus, who had sprung forward, was unable to prevent it. The Countess Waldstein, who had entered the room just in time to behold her confessor flying through the window, screamed and fell senseless.

Rugena turned pale, but stood silent, gazing steadily at Jerome.

"Forgive me, dear lady, for having made you witness of my passion," he said, alarmed at the condition of the Countess, upon whom Rugena was now in attendance.

"I hope, Master Jerome, that my presence may never hinder you from defending a noble cause, especially when the matter doth concern our Father John, so dear to all of us! I am, on the contrary, much delighted that that viper hath received the chastisement he hath long deserved," answered Rugena, looking at him with a peculiar expression.

Love and delight were so clearly expressed in this look that Jerome trembled and involuntarily turned aside, seeking Vok's eyes. But the young Count was leaning out of the window, looking laughingly on at what was happening in the street.

The noise of the dispute had attracted curious onlookers, and a crowd had already begun to gather in front of

the house when Father Ilarius, bursting through the window, crashed onto the pavement, nearly crushing two women who were listening open-mouthed to the noise within the house. The insults which had been directed at Hus spread from mouth to mouth among the people, who lost no time in avenging their favorite. Instead of helping the monk to his feet they began to rain blows and unflattering epitaphs upon him, spitting upon his tonsure; and Heaven knows in what the scene would have terminated had not Hus himself appeared in the street and by the severity of his words restrained the crowd, which shortly afterwards dispersed.

Ilarius, covered with bruises and scratches, with a bleeding face, a broken tooth, and a torn and dirty cassock, retired to his room. He was panting with rage and thirst for revenge, and on the following day a letter, filled with spiteful and malicious calumnies against Hus and Jerome, and setting forth a long list of insults pronounced by them against the Pope, was despatched to Bologna. It was addressed to Father Bonaventura, treasurer of his Eminence, Bishop Brancaccio.

II

THE days succeeding were marked by great disturbances in the town.

Hus protested against his excommunication and continued to preach in the Bethlehem Chapel, being upheld in this by the Queen, who attended her confessor's sermons as before.

King Venceslas, although he forbade the singing of obscene songs about the Archbishop under penalty of death, nevertheless authorized the possessors of the books that had been burnt to demand payment for their loss from Zbynek and the priests who had taken part in the *auto-da-fé*. The knight Kobyl, Governor of Vyshegrad, and Vok von Waldstein were chosen to put the King's will into effect.

This was a time of special difficulty for Rugena, poisoned for her by domestic annoyances.

Not only was her husband constantly absent upon different matters, but her mother-in-law began to persecute her. The Countess Waldstein had heard Rugena's approving words when Ilarius had been flung out of the window and visited the offense to her confessor upon her daughter-in-law. She blamed her too for Vok's excesses, declaring that Rugena had driven him away by her coldness, capriciousness, and tyranny.

Rugena felt herself completely deserted, and in this state of mind her warm and friendly relations with Jerome acted like healing balm on her sick heart.

Although Jerome, like all adherents of reform, was absorbed in the arguments and deliberations concerning the questions which engrossed all University and political gatherings, he gladly spent his free time with the young Countess, and tried in every way to entertain her by reading, singing, or instruction in the arts and sciences. His attentions evoked the deepest gratitude on Rugena's part, and established a dangerous intimacy between them. The visits of Jerome cost her more than one scene with the Countess Jan, who, while far from suspecting Rugena of infidelity to her husband, accused her of encouraging Jerome's visits as an annoyance to herself.

Jerome's love for the young Countess had increased tenfold since he had received that intoxicating glance from her on the famous occasion of Father Ilarius's aërial flight. The thought that perhaps he was beloved by this adorable woman agitated him and awoke in him the burning desire, by some means or other, to become assured of it, to behold Rugena divested of the mask behind which she always hid her feelings.

An unexpected event accelerated the crisis.

Vok had delightedly headed a punitive expedition against the abbot of a certain monastery, and other priests who had taken part in the destruction of the works of Wycliffe and had carried away for redemption some precious objects from their sacristries and gold from their

treasuries. A priest of one of the largest and richest parishes in the environs of Prague shut himself up in his house and flatly refused to pay the sum of money demanded of him. Waldstein forced an entry into his house, and in searching for his treasures found among them a beautiful young girl whom the pious shepherd of the Church—despite her cries and protests—had carried to his house. Before departing from that place Vok ordered the priest to be soundly thrashed for his depravity.

Unhappily Rugena, after leaving the Queen, met her husband in the road returning from the expedition, and carrying before him on his horse the beautiful girl whom he had rescued from her "spiritual" lover. Vok glanced smilingly at his wife, and rode past with his prize to the tavern to get some refreshments.

Rugena returned home furious, and a bold plan of revenge entered her mind. At that moment she hated her husband, imagining that everybody would now begin to mock and point at her. Walking about the room absorbed in her thoughts, she noticed neither the page who entered to make an announcement, nor Jerome, who came in shortly afterwards, and who, on receiving no answer to his greeting, looked at her in amazement.

"Good Heavens! What ails you, Countess? Has something terrible happened?" he asked, approaching her.

"I hate Vok, and never wish to meet him again! That is what has happened!" broke from her lips.

"Happy man to arouse this jealousy! He is to be

envied," said Jerome, smiling sadly. "I feared the madcap had in some way offended you. But take it not so close to heart. He is fiery and impulsive, and easily carried away, but it is impossible for him not to love you. Be assured that he will soon appear to ask your pardon."

Rugena laughed scornfully.

"You are profoundly mistaken, Master Jerome. I am not jealous of Vok, for I have never loved him; nor will he come to ask my pardon, for neither doth he love me. I am but the victim of family necessities! Did I know to what manner of man they had given me? He saw in me but a wealthy heiress who would bring him ten castles, eighty villages, and much gold as a dowry, to cover the debts of the family and pay for his dissoluteness. I wish not for his love, but I have the right to demand that he put me not to public shame! The thought that I am united to him and cannot free myself from the chains I loathe maddens me!"

She spoke passionately, but suddenly her wrath melted into despair. She sank upon a chair, and covering her face with her hands burst into sobs.

"In what have I deserved such shame? All have abandoned me and I have none to love me!" she moaned.

Jerome forgot everything. He fell upon his knees before her and took her hand.

"None to love you! You? Have you never felt that I adore you with all my soul, and am ready to shed the last drop of my blood for you?"

Rugena rose to her feet with a pale face. Had she

heard aright? Was it possible that he, the idol of all Prague, whose learning surpassed that of the professors, whose eloquence held crowds captive, could really love her? Yet his gaze was full of passion. . . . She saw that he spoke the truth, and that the hero of her childish dreams was at her feet.

Had Rugena been calmer she might have been frightened at his avowal. But at that moment, outraged pride and anger against her husband had convulsed her whole soul. A feeling of victorious and intoxicating happiness banished all obstacles, all doubts.

"Is it true that you love me, Jerome?" she asked, stooping over him.

"Alas! To my misfortune it is true. Forgive me, Rugena, for my mad words. They were called forth by your tears. Do not drive me from you," muttered Jerome, trying to rise.

But Rugena encircled his neck with her arms, and bowing her head to his shoulder whispered with trembling lips:

"I have nothing to forgive. For the first time in my life I have felt a moment of true happiness. I have loved thee for long, Jerome, since that first day when I saw thee in Rabstein Castle."

And in a few words she told him of her childish dreams, whose ideal he had been. Enraptured by this unexpected joy Jerome drew her into his arms and pressed his lips to hers.

Rugena hid her face in his breast. She was experi-

encing a feeling she had never known till then—a feeling in which bliss, peace, and agonizing bitterness were mingled.

At that moment Anna's face appeared between the folds of the door hangings. Petrified with amazement at what she saw she dropped the curtain, but did not leave the room, desiring to protect her friend's weakness from the gaze of prying eyes. Jerome was the first to recollect himself. He seated himself beside Rugena, holding her hand in his.

"Beloved!" he said, looking tenderly at her. "Had I but dreamt that an old bird of passage such as I could have been pleasing to a charming child, who even then gave promise of rare beauty, I would have become a stay-at-home, and contested thee against all the world. And now it remains for me but to gird up my loins and flee, for such moments make me traitor to my friend."

Rugena turned pale. It seemed beyond her strength to relinquish such happiness, but newly tasted; and her heart besides was in a ferment of resentment against her husband.

"A traitor to such as he! He deserves to be betrayed. I at least feel it not binding upon myself to be true to a profligate who is not ashamed to ride along the streets with a fallen woman," she said with scorn. "Is it for his sake that we must part? Never. I do not wish thee to leave me. If thou goest, let us go together. This house is abhorrent to me. I will fly from it and follow thee to the uttermost ends of the earth!"

"Tempt me not, Rugena! Your words will blind my reason! Conscience tells me that to bind thy fate with mine, to involve thee in all the adventures of my roving life with its eternal struggles, were a sin! Maybe the stake awaits a heretic such as I. Can I offer the woman I adore a certain shelter, and a peaceful life? Truly I could not even die becomingly did I know thee to be left in a false and insecure position."

"I wish thee not to die! I wish thee to live, and to live for me alone. If thou dost really love me thou wilt find the means to free me and to bear me with thee," Rugena said, warmly.

Jerome passionately kissed her hand.

"From this moment I am thy slave! I will consider well and find a means to save thee. We will depart in a few days. And afterwards from some safe place we will seek a divorce, for thou must be mine in face of God and man. And now fare thee well. To-morrow I will come to thee again. We have been too incautious as it is!"

He again bent and kissed her, and before Rugena had time to recover herself he was gone.

It was dusk already, and he did not perceive Anna as he left the room. Meeting nobody except two pages who were lighting candles in the candlesticks, Jerome gained the street and returned home.

His head was burning and his heart beat violently. What had happened was for him a turning-point in his life. Perhaps Heaven had sent this new indescribable happiness to him as a token that he had worked suffi-

ciently for others, and might begin to think of himself?

To his astonishment he beheld Hus, sitting at the table in his room turning over the leaves of a manuscript which was spread open before him.

"Hail to thee, John! What art thou doing?" Jerome asked absent-mindedly, casting his hat and cloak on to a chair.

"Why, while waiting for thee I have been glancing at thy tract in defense of Wycliffe's *De Trinitate,*" answered Hus, looking at him in some astonishment.

"Ah! That indeed is interesting," answered Jerome, in a tone which showed clearly that his thoughts were far away, and that he listened with his ears alone.

Hus took his hand and drew him to a chair.

"There now! Sit down and make confession," he said in a friendly manner. "Why dost thou wear such a strange, preoccupied, and blissful aspect? Something has befallen thee. Thy head, it seems, doth float in air!"

"Yes, thou art right; and I am like to lose it altogether," answered Jerome, running his fingers through his clustering hair.

Noting his friend's searching glance he continued:

"Ah, John! If thou didst but know from whence I come, and what I have been doing thou wouldst most sternly reprove me."

A sad smile played for a moment upon the pale face of Hus.

"Confession—doth remove half the guilt!"

"Nay, not in this case. If it did but concern me alone!

But I have sinned and thereby disturbed an innocent heart," he said, leaping to his feet and striding excitedly about the room.

"Thou art incorrigible! Is it possible that neither years nor reason have placed a check upon thy foolish love adventures?" said Hus, reproachfully. "I know that women favor thee, but at least leave maiden hearts in peace. Bethink thee whether thou art fit to be a husband—a homeless vagabond, who, like the Wandering Jew, can find no rest."

"But now 'tis another matter! 'Tis time for me to settle down, abandoning my roving life. Thou art right: I have loved much, and for the most part lightly. But now my heart hath been given forever. A feeling such as I have never felt before consumes my soul. A woman, lovely as an angel, pure as a lily, loves me! Dost thou hear, John? Loves me to distraction, and . . . I am her slave."

A look of deadly horror overspread the face of Hus, and he gazed sternly into the eyes of his friend.

"I understand thee well! That woman lovely as an angel is the wife of Vok von Waldstein, and her purity hath surely offended thine eyes, that thou dost seek to sully it with a foul stain."

It was now Jerome's turn to grow pale.

"Thou hast guessed—it is Rugena! And I will permit thee, ascetic, who hath subdued the flesh, and is untouched by passion, to judge me as a priest, and as a friend. But there are circumstances that make our guilt less heavy.

Vok doth betray his wife in the most unpardonable manner, and her woman's pride is daily outraged. Is it marvelous that she should thirst for love and happiness and strive to rend the chain that binds her? I sin, for I am but a man, and cannot resist temptation when such a woman as Rugena says to me, 'I love thee, and have ever loved thee. I will follow thee to the world's end: only bear me hence.' Her will is law to me, and I will fly with her. I will be happy, and give her happiness!"

Passion and indomitable resolution were betrayed in his words, his actions, and his shining glance.

A flush rose to the face of Hus and he got up from his seat.

"Thou art preparing to abduct Rugena? Madman! 'Tis not enough for thee to besmirch her pure soul with a forbidden love! Thou must still degrade her, make her thy concubine, drag the tender being, accustomed to all ease and luxury, through the vicissitudes of thy wandering life!"

"Stay, John! Do not offend me needlessly. Yes, I wish to bear away Rugena and to hide her, but only until such time as a divorce may be obtained, and she may stand beside me at God's altar."

"Thou dost wish for her to be divorced? To which Pope art thou minded to apply for such a favor?" said Hus, smiling. "To Gregory XII in Rimini? But thou hast refused obedience to him, and he will scarcely help thee. Pope John XXIII in Rome is no better disposed towards thee, for thou hast dubbed him Antichrist. And

Boniface is too far removed from us, and his power is acknowledged in Aragon alone. Even if one of these should grant thee a divorce, the remaining two would annul the decision as unlawful. Recollect thyself, Jerome! Listen to the voice of reason and honor, and fly before thou hast worked irremediable evil, before thou art weighed down by three great crimes: against God, against a man who holds thee his friend, and against a weak and blindly-trustful woman who loves thee!"

Jerome was confused, and hung his head in silence. He felt that Hus was right; his hopes seemed unrealizable, and conscience whispered to him too. Yet to abandon happiness seemed beyond his strength.

"John, thou dost demand an inhuman sacrifice from me! Thou dost condemn me to two deaths; for not only shall I suffer the loss of the most exquisite creature vouchsafed to man, but Rugena will hate me if I abandon her after what to-day hath passed between us."

" 'Twere better for her to hate than to despise thee. The human heart is changeable. Who knows but what the bliss of which you both dream in time may weigh upon you? I demand nothing of thee. But as thy priest I recall to thee the words of the Bible: *'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife!'* And as thy friend I say to thee: pity the woman thou dost profess to love; do not condemn her to a moral death, do not deprive her of the possibility to return to the true path. The intoxication of passion is brief; repentance is terrible and prolonged. And as a last resort I would remind thee of the national

and religious struggle in which we both are engaged. Will honor permit thee to fly the field of battle in the moment when thine eloquence and learning should belong entirely to thy country."

Jerome covered his face with his hands. It was obvious that a terrible struggle was proceeding within him.

After long silence he rose, pale but determined. Traces of the moral upheaval through which he had just passed were observable in his voice and downcast gaze.

"Thou hast conquered, John," he said, dully. "I renounce personal happiness and will depart as soon as possible without again seeing Rugena. Let this renunciation serve thee as the measure of my love to her. I will not be the cause of her fall. The future will show whether I am right in this, and whether I have acted well in condemning her to life with Vok, which can mean nothing for her but unhappiness."

"When a man fulfils his duty he cannot be unhappy. A tranquil conscience will sustain him," Hus answered firmly. "Friend, give me thy hand! I congratulate thee on thy victory! Believe me that one day Rugena too will thank thee for not profiting by her inexperience."

"I had promised to be with her to-morrow. Go, thou, in place of me, bid her farewell from me, and explain to her the reason that I fly from her," said Jerome, in a low voice.

Then, seizing hat and cloak, he rushed from the room. Hus followed him.

After Jerome's departure Rugena shut herself within her room and her first agitation melted in a gush of tears. Vok, happily, did not return that night; and when she awoke late next morning after a heavy sleep a reaction took place within her. With a feeling of horror, not unmixed with rapture, she recalled the events of the evening before.

At thought of the kisses and words of love she had exchanged with Jerome her whole being was thrilled with joy; but shame and remorse were already awakening in her soul. She was too pure and honest to be able to reject all the principles of morality in a single night.

The day dragged on with almost unbearable heaviness, and when (Vok being still absent) her mother-in-law, surprised at her evident discomposure, asked in a friendly manner what ailed her, Rugena nearly swooned. Her agitation increased hour by hour. Jerome, she thought, had probably fixed the time and arranged the details of their flight which she herself had desired. But now she was terrified at thought of this decisive step.

Instead of Jerome, Hus appeared and asked to speak with her alone. Under the sad, stern gaze of her confessor Rugena blushed and trembled.

With bowed head she followed him into the oratory and sank upon her knees before the shrine.

"You awaited another whose words would have been pleasanter to you than mine," said Hus, after a silence. "But I, in fulfilment of the promise I gave, have come to bring you Jerome's farewell. To-morrow he will depart,

not to return until he can look upon you without a blush."

Rugena gave a dull cry.

"He hath abandoned me? He doth not love me?"

"Nay, he loved you too much to ruin you and to lower you to the position of women . . . of another sort. Come to yourself, Rugena, and be ashamed that you have so grievously forgot your duty," said Hus, severely.

But the blow had fallen too heavily upon Rugena. The loss of the man she loved banished all thought of shame from her heart. Bitterly she began recounting the insults and betrayals of her husband, repudiating every obligation on her part to be true to him.

Hus did not interrupt her until sobs choked her voice.

"Make open declaration of that, and then depart courageously," he said.

"But may I?" she murmured, looking at him in astonishment.

"You may not, it is sure. Yet you desire to flee stealthily, by night. Believe me, my daughter, every act that fears the light and would hide under cover of darkness is an evil act! You know as well as I why you are ashamed, why you would hide from human eyes, far less terrible than the eye of God. You accuse your husband and maintain that you hate him for his trangressions against you; but how shall the sins of others serve as a condonation for our own? Is your conscience above reproach?"

And sternly he recalled her life since her marriage. Had she striven to love her husband and attract him to

her by mildness and indulgence, he asked. Had she not rather repelled him by coldness and indifference and cruel, offensive words? Then he spoke of duty which man is obliged to fulfil however irksome it may be, submitting to the trials of life that he may not later be tormented by pangs of conscience, and the fear of judgment.

The preacher had never, perhaps, been so eloquent as at that moment, when he poured forth his burning faith and passionate love of righteousness upon the troubled soul of the penitent.

When at length Hus departed, Rugena, entirely conquered by his exhortations, firmly resolved to submit to the demands of the duties God had imposed upon her.

III

It was a Sunday towards the end of May, 1412. Notwithstanding the early hour the streets of Prague were filled with people. Some were hastening to mass; others to make purchases at the innumerable little stalls and booths which had sprung up for the fair like mushrooms, for the sale of different commodities brought in from the surrounding districts.

On the square before the Tynsky Cathedral the crowd was particularly dense, and a solid mass of people was surrounding two platforms constructed out of planks, from each of which a monk was haranguing them. The noise of drums and trumpets which resounded at intervals in the neighborhood of these street pulpits attracted ever new crowds of spectators.

Among them stood Broda and Matthias. One was listening frowningly, the other smiling sarcastically at the monkish oratory.

"Brothers!" squeaked one of the preachers, loudly, "words of mine are too weak to depict the blessings which you may enjoy by acquiring one of the indulgences conferred upon the faithful by His Holiness, John XXIII, with the inexhaustible generosity of a father for his erring children. Which of us hath a conscience unstained by sin? Who doth not tremble at thought of

God's judgment, or beseech Heaven for the pardon of departed dear ones who are suffering the awful torments of Hell? Who doth not fear for his children lest eternal perdition be awaiting them? It lies with you to flee from all these torments by laying in a store of absolution. . . . Here are indulgences for all, and to meet every need, total or partial, for 500, for 300 or 200 years; here are remission of future sins and exemptions from the pains of Purgatory. These blessings are for the poorest as for the highest nobility: all have equal chances of escaping the torments of the world to come. Even he who hath already set forth upon the path of ruin may boldly present himself at the gates of Paradise, and St. Peter on reading the indulgence will not question him concerning his transgressions, but will fling open the gates of Heaven before him. And there, behold, God the Father will be sitting on gold and silver clouds, and beside Him, His Heavenly Son, surrounded by throngs of angels and archangels, by Cherubim and Seraphim. The sinner in terror will fall down before the Throne of the Almighty, but the angels, beholding the indulgence in his hand, will present it unto God, and Christ will say, 'What My representative hath pardoned on earth shall be pardoned in Heaven likewise. Go, My son, and sing My praises.' And the angels will upraise the blessed one upon a cloud and show him the glories of the Heavenly Kingdom. He will sleep in the shade of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and will fearlessly partake of that same fruit that wrought the downfall of Adam. . . ."

The monk, exhausted, paused to take breath.

His words had produced various sentiments in his listeners. Some laughed and giggled mockingly. Unflattering remarks concerning the Pope and his ambassadors were heard on different sides; and there were also cries of indignation against the audacious vendor of indulgences.

Many from among the crowd rushed into the church, but Broda, laughing heartily, turned to Matthias.

"Be of good cheer, old friend! This shaven rascal shall charm nothing from our pockets!" he cried.

"Yes, 'tis well that Master Hus doth open the eyes of fools, and reveal the true value of all these indulgences and bulls. 'Tis not his fault if there are still sheep that let themselves be shorn."

"Yes, he stands like a lion for truth, with his sermons and contentions, and doth paste refutations at all street-corners. Jerome, since his return to Prague, hath aided him in all as 'tis his wont. A wondrous man, Jerome," said Broda, warmly. "God hath endowed him with all talents! Hast thou seen, Matthias, the picture which not long since he did paint upon a wall?"

"No."

"Come, I will show it thee!"

"Shall we not be late for the sermon in the Bethlehem Chapel?"

"Not so! We will hasten our steps and be in time," said Broda, drawing his companion away.

Not only was the building filled to overflowing, but

surrounded in the street by a crowd of such density that all Broda's gigantic strength was needed to force a way for them, and even then they could get no further than the door. But being both of immense size they were able to see, over the heads of the people, what was proceeding in the chapel.

Hus was in the pulpit, and his ardent face expressed the burning conviction inspiring him.

Some of the preacher's words were lost by distance, but when in an outburst of enthusiasm he raised his voice, fragments of his speech reached Broda and Matthias.

"Brethren," he was saying at that moment, "think not that I deny the power of the Holy See. None can submit more humbly than I to the power with which God hath invested the Pope. I do but protest against the misuse of that power, especially that of to-day. Conscience doth oblige me to protect you all against deception which perverts the very words of Christ."

The preacher's voice was lost for a few moments; but then was heard again.

"Take heed, my brethren! Trust not in absolution which hatred hath dictated, the words of which are blasphemy against the truths of Scripture. Take heed, I say, and purchase not for yourselves indulgences measuring by gold God's mercy, lulling yourselves with vain hopes that unrighteousness can be expiated by aught save true and deep repentance, and good works! . . ."

When the sermon was ended the crowd began, little by little, to disperse.

Among those who now appeared in the entry were old Count Waldstein, Vok, Rugena, and Anna. They had stopped not far from the door, waiting for the people to pass out, and exchanging their impressions of the sermon they had just heard.

At that moment Jerome emerged through a second door, that leading to the sacristy and the cell of Hus. He passed the Waldsteins without seeing them, and mingled with the crowd. Vok hastened after him and seized him by the cloak.

"Whither speedest thou, Jerome? Or was it thy wish to shun thy friends?"

"Why so? I knew not thou wert in the church. Myself, I have heard the sermon sitting upon the bench behind the pulpit."

"Why, we are all here; my father and Rugena too. Come, they will rejoice to see thee. And I am like to rate thee for having been so long in Prague and coming not to visit us."

"Every day have I purposed to be with you, but all this time I have been so engrossed in work that my head is in a whirl. And the two last weeks I have spent in Voykovitz."

Thus conversing they approached the old Count and the ladies. Jerome kissed Rugena's hand with knightly grace and seemed not to notice the trembling of her fingers, the only sign of agitation which escaped her.

Jerome seemed tranquil, and as witty as before; but his face had assumed a serious and stern expression

hitherto unobserved upon it. The old Count invited him to his house, and he at once accepted the invitation. They all proceeded in the direction of home.

"What took thee to Voykovitz when there were such weighty happenings here?" Vok inquired.

"I had to put in order divers old affairs and reckonings. But, beyond that, I was mightily diverted by the edifying sale of seats in Paradise. Conceive that there they march about to the beating of drums bartering their devilish wares in towns and villages. And when a poor fool of a clodhopper hath not sufficient money the monks take from him in payment sheep, cows, and other cattle. If, by good fortune, I had not been in Voykovitz they would have laid bare my peasants."

"I will follow thy wise example, and take measures to restrain the labors of the reverend fathers in my estates that lie near Prague," said Vok, laughingly.

After dinner Countess Jan withdrew, pleading indisposition. But the truth was that she had been on bad terms with her son and husband since Vencel Tim, the papal legate, had arrived in town to sell indulgences, and to preach a crusade against the bishoprics of Salzburg, Magdeburg, and Prague.

Relations between Rugena and her husband had improved. Led by remorse and the desire to expiate her fault, the young woman had been less severe, and had tried by meekness and gentleness to attract him to her side. He was at first amazed by this, and afterwards touched, and as he adored his young wife in so far as he

was capable, he refrained from escapades of too scandalous a nature, in order to avoid offending her.

Although the whole nervous crisis through which Rugena had lived had acted powerfully upon her tender nature, it was the fierce though silent struggle with her love for Jerome, in which she had stubbornly refused to be conquered, which finally prostrated her.

She fell seriously ill, and for two weeks her life hung upon a thread. The fear of losing his wife sobered young Count Waldstein, and drew him penitent to her sick-bed.

When Rugena began to recover he tried indeed to be more steady, and his repentance was as extravagant and noisy as his folly had been. Rugena was kind and affectionate, and when from time to time Vok's impulsive nature drove him in spite of everything to some mad adventure she still preserved her indulgent attitude. But during her illness she grew more self-absorbed, more serious and reserved, and her whole being was pervaded by her hidden sorrow.

Anna, as before, lived in the Waldsteins' house in spite of several exceedingly advantageous offers of marriage, even resisting her brother's repeated invitations to her to share his home. Rugena, to tease her, asserted that she was still waiting for Svietomir, but in her heart —since Anna had confessed to witnessing the scene with Jerome—she was very glad to keep by her side this devoted friend who alone knew of her weakness.

IV

A FEW days later several horsemen were riding along a street in the Mala Strana, which lies upon the left bank of the river. One of these wore a light suit of armor, and rode at the head of the others with his vizor dropped. Behind him rode a priest, a page, an equerry, and four armed men, leading pack-horses by their bridles.

The nearer they drew to the market-place the more difficult grew their progress, as there were many people in the streets. The sound of singing, shouts, and laughter arose from the moving crowds. Reaching the square, the knight was obliged to keep close to the houses, and at last he halted altogether.

A mass of heads was seething on all sides. In front of the Archbishop's palace a high chariot was drawn up, but it was difficult, owing to the people, to obtain a clear glimpse of it.

Suddenly the crowd gave way, making a passage for a procession which then emerged and passed just in front of the travelers.

Musicians, drummers, and trumpeters, pounding with all their might upon their instruments, came marching before an enormous vehicle, in which sat two women with impudent faces, and of dissolute appearance. From the neck of each hung a papal bull. All around them, in

the chariot and by the side of it, sat or walked monks singing hymns, though far from devout ones, ridiculing the Pope, his indulgences, and his Crusade. The people clapped their hands, joining in the singing of the monks, and giving vent to various ejaculations concerning the priesthood. At length the procession disappeared round the corner of the street.

All this time the knight stood motionless. The hand which held his rein was trembling slightly, while the other sternly clutched the handle of the dagger which hung from his belt.

Noticing a clerk who was passing, the rider stopped him and inquired, in Latin, the meaning of the strange procession.

"They bear the bull of 'the Romish Antichrist' in triumph to the New Town, there to burn it beneath a scaffold," said the other with an absorbed air, hurrying to overtake the procession.

Now it was possible for the riders to proceed further. Reaching the Archbishop's palace they turned into the courtyard, after some parley with the gatekeeper.

On the evening of that same day we behold the knight in the Archbishop's sleeping chamber, whither he had been led after his conversation with Albik, who had succeeded Zbynek Zaitza as Archbishop of Prague.

He was reclining in an armchair wrapped in a wide mantle of violet-colored silk. Two wax candles in silver candlesticks shed a quivering light upon the strongly marked features of our old acquaintance, Thomas Bran-

caccio. He has changed little since we saw him last, being still the same handsome, well-built man, with hair as black as jet.

Behind his armchair Father Bonaventura was standing, and before him, on a folding chair, sat Ilarius, who was listening in a cringing attitude to the words of the Bishop.

"I have come personally to acquaint myself as to what is happening in Prague, later to give an account thereof to the Holy Father. But in order that my actions may be freer, I wish not to appear officially, and my presence here must be made known to as few as possible. You, Father Ilarius, are probably well-informed of everything, and will be able to communicate much to me. I am particularly desirous to learn the details of that sacrilegious ceremony which to-day I witnessed."

"Alack, Your Eminence! Sacrilege is common here. 'Tis impossible to describe the sufferings of the Christian soul at the constant derision of everything it holds most sacred. But at your command I will endeavor to describe the bacchanalia held by these heretics during the presence of our most revered Vencel Tim in the city."

With a malignant expression he began describing to the Cardinal the outrageous scenes which had accompanied the sale of the indulgences, ascribing all the evil to the accursed and criminal activity of John Hus and Jerome.

"'Tis these two hell-born heretics have infected all

Bohemia! God knows to what it all may lead if the Holy Father take not strict and timely measures against these machinators who dare to vent their spleen on all they should respect. None of the priesthood can count upon real safety!" cried Ilarius, his face crimson with indignation. "The voice of the blasphemer must be choked! He must be forbidden to preach! For he dares openly revile the Pope, denying the power of his indulgences, and inciting the people by his sermons. Only yesterday there was, at his order, a great controversy at the University, at which one of the professors put him to shame, saying: 'Thou art a priest and yet dost revile the priesthood. 'Tis a sorry bird that sullies its own nest.' But then that worthy man was laughed to scorn, and Jerome pronounced a speech still more inflaming, and the students bore him in triumph upon their shoulders. That infamous procession Your Eminence had the unhappiness of witnessing was a device of Vok von Waldstein, whose head is turned by heresy and vice. Only to madness or the promptings of the devil can be ascribed the brazen audacity of carrying two harlots decked with papal bulls in triumph through the city. And, good Lord, what have they not done besides? Close to the ravine by the New Town they erected a scaffold, and beneath it a stake at which they burned the bulls. And near by, in mockery, they placed a box like those in which the faithful place their money for the indulgences, and cast into it all sorts of filth. The people were in such

excitement that when I, with Brother Bojek of the Strakhovsky Monastery, returned to the Old Town, they cried out after us: 'Seize the monks!' "

"Dogs! I hope that more than one of them will still burn at the stake instead of papal bulls!" said Brancaccio, furiously.

"I will sing Hallelujah from morn till night on the day Jerome and Hus are burnt," squeaked Ilarius, his little roving eyes aglow with malice.

"First of all," remarked Brancaccio, "the Archbishop must complain to the King, and Vok von Waldstein must be removed."

After a long interview, during which the Cardinal closely questioned Ilarius concerning Vok von Waldstein, his father, and other of the nobility who were allied to Hus, he released the monk, ordering him to tell the Countess Jan that he would visit her two days later. In this way he would avoid a meeting with both Counts, who had gone for some days to Totchnik, where the count was lying.

None of these pious cronies had observed that Brancaccio's page, whom he had sent to rest, had slipped behind the curtains and had not lost a word of their conversation. When Ilarius began to take his leave, the page darted out like a shadow, and, stretching himself upon his couch, pretended to be asleep.

This page was a beautiful youth, of middle height, very slender, almost lean. His face was framed by thick, fair, reddish hair with a metallic tinge. His large, black,

languishing eyes wore a saturnine expression, especially now, as he crept beneath the coverlets, murmuring:

"By what villainies and tears of blood this body of reprobates will stain their path!"

Two days later Brancaccio was in the company of his cousin in the Waldstein palace. The Countess's eyes were swollen with crying. She sat imparting to the Cardinal her grief concerning the manifest heresy of her husband and son, and trying anxiously to elicit from him whether the indulgences she already possessed would be sufficient to expiate their apostasy. Brancaccio reassured her upon this point, while advising her for the sake of perfect safety to become possessed of a special indulgence from among those which the Holy Father's generosity had now placed at the disposal of the faithful.

The Cardinal's refusal to stay at their house occasioned in the Countess a fresh outburst of tears.

"Know, Cousin Giovanna," said the Cardinal, touched by her despair, "that a prince of the Church cannot receive the hospitality of heretics who defame those things which are most sacred to him. But I will often visit you, and hope that both the Counts, if only out of respect for my rank and for me, their relative, will refrain from openly insulting me."

Then he inquired about Rugena, and whether she too had been affected by the heresy.

"Alas! Hus is her confessor, and I need say no more. Though her behavior is blameless. Do you desire to see her, Cousin Thomasso? She hath gone to accompany Vok

and my husband, but may return at any moment. Here she is, I think. I hear the sound of horses' hoofs."

Brancaccio went to the window and drew aside the edge of the curtain which covered it. He gazed at Rugena with eyes wide-open with astonishment, as she and Anna, escorted by Broda and Matthias, trotted lightly up to the steps of the house. She was mounted upon a beautiful white horse covered with a handsome cloth, and she rode it like an experienced horsewoman. The quick ride had brought a faint rosy flush to her usually pale cheeks. The clinging folds of her black velvet riding-habit revealed her graceful figure, and her golden curls loosened by the wind gleamed in the sunshine.

A deep flush suddenly suffused the Cardinal's face and his black eyes glowed. But Brancaccio was an adept at concealing his feelings, and when he turned from the window his face wore an expression of indifference.

"The woman has fulfilled the promise of childhood," he remarked patronizingly. "The Countess Rugena is charming, and I shall be rejoiced to renew my acquaintance with her. I will accept your invitation, Madonna Giovanna, and remain to dine with you and your fair daughter-in-law."

Rugena met Brancaccio with respect but with reserve. His assured manner and tall figure invested him with a certain dignity. It could not fail to produce an effect upon her, notwithstanding her somewhat inimical and irreligious attitude towards the priesthood which was nourished by the spirit of the times.

When the courtly Cardinal began in a most friendly manner to converse with her about her past, calling to mind her father, Rugena's distrust of him was finally dispersed.

Brancaccio's words revived her childish recollections, and she remembered seeing him at Waldstein on the eve of that fatal day on which Baron Svietomir departed, to return only in his coffin. She remembered that her father was then amicably disposed towards the Bishop, who was with him during his last moments. All these circumstances were propitious to Brancaccio, and Rugena, when taking leave of him, asked his blessing in all sincerity.

From that day the Cardinal became a constant guest at the Waldsteins' palace, and, what was most surprising of all, was as cordially received by the young as by the elder Countess. Vok was displeased by these visits, and looked askance at them. He was convinced that Brancaccio, like most priests, was a rascal, particularly as he was the nephew of Baldassare Cossa. But he was assured of his wife's fidelity, and did not wish to quarrel again with his mother. Besides which, the young Count was too heedless to dwell for long on disturbing thoughts, and he had so much to distract him during his constant and prolonged absences from home occasioned by his attendance upon the King that at times he forgot the very existence of the "papal spy" as he termed Brancaccio. He little suspected what a terrible threat hung above his head through the skilful machinations of the perfidious Italian,

who hated him doubly as a scoffer at the Church and as the husband of Rugena.

The second reason was, indeed, the more powerful. The young woman's striking beauty and spiritual purity were especially alluring to a roué like Brancaccio, who had already tasted everything in life. A storm of passion was raging in the Cardinal's dark soul, which increased in fury day by day. Profligate by nature, putting no limits upon his desires, he thirsted at all costs to possess Rugena—by force or cunning. In his resourceful mind he had conceived a fiendish plan which demanded first of all an irreparable estrangement between husband and wife.

It was necessary to gain Rugena's confidence, and this he succeeded in doing by his simulated benevolence and the Christian forbearance he displayed in his pronouncements upon the events of the day. Emboldened by this attitude Rugena spoke to him of her confessor, endeavoring to exonerate him from the accusations leveled against him. Brancaccio listened to her indulgently, and although he refused to meet Hus personally, promised to use his influence with the Pope to put an end to his trial, saying that he was now convinced that Hus was a devoted son of the Church who had been led astray only by his excessive zeal for truth.

V

MATTHIAS noted with ever-growing mistrust and disquietude Brancaccio's frequent visits and his friendly relations with the young Countess. He could not forget the suspicious, perhaps criminal, rôle Brancaccio had played at the time of the death of Baron Waldstein, who, the old servant was firmly persuaded, had been the victim of a foul murder. Matthias was constantly haunted by the thought that Brancaccio might be dangerous to Rugena, and he communicated his fears to Broda, with whom he was on very friendly terms. He could not bring himself to reveal the whole truth, but confessed that it alarmed him to witness the long conversations of the young Countess with the Italian Cardinal, whom he considered a dissolute villain, as a proof of which he told how he had detected a disguised woman in Brancaccio's suite in Pilsen.

"I'll wager that the page Tullius who waits upon him now is also some make of female."

This hint was not made in vain. Broda's attention was aroused, and he began to watch the page, who often came to the house; sometimes with the Cardinal himself, sometimes upon a mission from him. He very quickly reached two decisions: firstly that Tullius was undoubtedly a woman, and secondly that she hated Brancaccio.

Deep suffering was expressed in the mournful glance of the page and in the bitter lines about his mouth. Then the suspicion awoke in Broda that this must be some victim of the Cardinal's. He began to observe the page still more closely, keeping a watch upon his comings and goings in the Archbishop's palace.

What was his astonishment on one occasion at beholding the page, wrapped in a cloak, his face hidden in the folds of his hood standing within the Bethlehem Chapel, where he listened to the sermon with evident emotion, and eyes full of tears. Broda followed him, and observed how in a dark corner he threw aside the cloak, subsequently returning openly towards the palace.

Not far from the market-place Broda overtook the page, greeted him, and invited him to accompany him to a tavern to drink a cup of wine. Tullius glanced at him mistrustfully.

"I thank you," he answered coldly, "but, methinks you are not amicably disposed unto my lord . . . and as a faithful servant I deem it not meet to drink with you."

"Well spoken, boy. But unless you deem it a necessity to be an enemy to all that love not the Cardinal, accept my invitation. Our discourse perhaps may please you."

The page gazed searchingly into Broda's frank and honest eyes.

"A cup of wine can bind me to nothing," he said at last. "Come, then, sir."

Broda led his companion to a tavern with which he

was acquainted, and whispered the host to show him a private room and bring thither wine, fruit, and honey-cakes. When the inn-keeper left the room, closing the door behind him, Tullius suddenly broke into laughter.

"Honey-cakes!" he said with a sly smile. "One might think that you were about to feast your mistress."

"In any case I feast a pretty woman, Tullius!" answered Broda, patting the page significantly upon the shoulder.

The page turned white, then crimson.

"A lie!" he cried, in a voice unlike his own, seizing his dagger.

"Drop that, sweetheart! 'Twould not stand against my sword. But I swear I have no evil intentions towards you. I would merely tell you, signora, that I have long known Brancaccio's habit to bear a hidden woman with him. I have remarked that you have no love for the reverend Thomasso. And when a young and beautiful woman like you plays a shameful rôle for a man she hates it means that she is forced to do it and therefore deserving of pity and help from every honest man. And I offer you this help, in no way seeking to penetrate your secrets. If you reject my offer then I swear on this"—and he raised the cross-shaped handle of his sword—"to forget our encounter and leave you to go your ways."

Tullius (or Tullia) listened to him with distracted air, with difficulty repressing her sighs, and suddenly sank on to a chair.

"It is true! I am a woman," she said in a low voice.

"I am put to shame and cannot defend myself, for that shame is . . . voluntary; incurred for the safeguarding of another who was dear to me. Mine is a long story, but, believe me, signor, I am no harlot."

"Had I thought that I should not have spoken thus to you. You are but the luckless victim of the unclean love of that villainous monk."

Tullia sat up, and her eyes were filled with a fierce hatred.

"Love? Can he love, even uncleanly?" she cried. "No, the monster knoweth nought save brutal animal passion. Oh, I have not words to describe the loathing with which he fills me"—and she pressed both hands to her breast. "If I have not fled from him till now, or sought refuge in death 'tis only that I desire first to be revenged on him. I follow his every step, and have already foiled more than one of his plans while he doth not suspect from whence the blow hath fallen. I do but await the chance to destroy him finally ere he despatch me, as he did my predecessors."

She shook as though in fever, and Broda tried with all his power to soothe her. They became friends, and Tullia informed him at parting that something was being plotted against the Waldsteins, and promised to warn him as soon as she could discover exactly what it was.

They left the inn by separate doors.

And Brancaccio was indeed contemplating the destruction of Vok, the most insolent and daring blasphemer against the Church. He must be made to pay for his

buffoonery in arranging the procession, and for having plundered the monasteries and mocked at the priesthood. In Ilarius and Bonaventura the Cardinal had two devoted followers. The last, especially, was consumed with personal hatred against the young Count because of an adventure which had befallen him, for which he held Vok responsible. On one occasion, Father Bonaventura, when returning from the New Town to the Archbishop's palace, was set upon by a group of unknown people who dragged him into the courtyard of some house, and there gave him a sound thrashing. The miscreants subsequently fled, taking with them his boots and cassock, so that he returned home in his shirt. But the monk had heard some one cry out, "'Tis he!" before he was seized, and the voice had sounded to him like that of Vok von Waldstein.

Brancaccio's passion increased day by day, fed by the very impossibility of its being appeased. Sometimes he even felt the lack of power to conceal it any longer, and with the licentiousness common to the age, and the insolent audacity which his long impunity implanted in him, he decided to hasten the conclusion.

Once, Brancaccio appeared at the Waldsteins' house earlier after midday than was his wont, and going straight to Rugena said that he had brought her a present as a souvenir, in view of his approaching departure. From a small case he drew forth a finely worked medallion in the form of a heart, set with rubies and brilliants.

"It was lately sent me from Rome. It containeth a

fragment of the True Cross and the finger-nails of some holy martyrs whose relics have just been unearthed in the catacombs. I felt I could not do better than confide these sacred things into your innocent hands."

Touched by this attention on the part of the Cardinal, Rugena thanked him warmly.

"May it bring you happiness," he concluded with apparent feeling. "Methinks, my daughter, that you are not happy, though you have never bestowed your confidence upon me, or opened your heart to me."

"I have not ventured to trouble Your Eminence," Rugena answered in confusion.

"That was not well, my daughter! Believe me that I feel disposed towards you as a father, and I have a weighty reason for my desire to see into your soul. But I would liefer speak with you in your oratory."

Rugena looked at him in surprise. But it seemed to her impossible to refuse such a simple request on the part of a member of the priesthood, especially one of such high standing as Brancaccio. And besides, her curiosity was aroused. Rising immediately, she led the Cardinal to her oratory, motioning him towards an arm-chair, while she herself sank on her knees beside him, at the reading-desk.

"Nay, my daughter, I am not minded to confess you. You have your own spiritual director, and I wish not to intrude upon his rights. I wish you but to tell me as a priest and friend whether you love and respect your husband, and whether indeed you are happy with him."

Brancaccio's tone and glance were so stern that Rugena murmured in confusion:

"I strive to love Vok from a sense of duty. . . . But he hath so oft insulted and betrayed me, our natures are so at variance, that I am sometimes very full of grief."

"Have you felt no desire to rend your chains? . . ."

He stopped, seeing that Rugena had flushed deeply. "Your face hath given me clear answer," he said, "and shows me how to act to save you from remorse of conscience. I have involuntarily contributed to your unhappiness."

"I do not understand you."

"You will soon understand. But can you keep silence till a given moment?"

"Most surely, if 'tis needful," she answered, with alarm in her voice.

Brancaccio rose, and looked through the door into the neighboring room. Satisfying himself that there was nobody in it he returned to his place and bent over Rugena.

"I promise you the possibility to seek happiness in another love more worthy of you, and that the Church will break the fetters which bind you to a man whom it is not even your duty to love, for he became possessed of you through crime."

"What say you? What crime?" cried Rugena, dully.

"The murder of your father."

Seeing that Rugena swayed, and nearly fell, the Car-

dinal drew a little bottle from his pocket and held it to her nostrils.

"Take courage, my child. Listen to what I have to reveal to you."

Rugena pressed her hands to her head. She felt that she was hastening to destruction; but she desired at all costs to learn the truth, and by a desperate effort of will controlled her weakness.

"Speak, I hear you!"

"You belike remember Giuseppa, the Countess's Italian waiting-woman, who was married in Bologna in the same year as yourself?"

"Yes."

"That woman died some weeks before my coming hither. But before her death she communicated to me in confession the details of a certain act of villainy, and permitted me to use her depositions as I might find needful. This is what I learnt from her. In the year your father died Count Vok was sixteen and Giuseppa was his mistress. The Waldsteins were at that time nearly beggared through the prodigality of the old Count, and the sole means of saving themselves from ruin was to seize the enormous property of Baron Svietomir by bestowing you on Vok in marriage. Negotiations were commenced, and your father was favorably inclined towards the plan, for he loved his cousin, with whose political convictions alone he was at variance. I spoke to him personally about it at the time when I was with you at Rabstein, and we repaired together to Prague, where the Baron was to

deliberate upon the question with the Count. Your husband, though he was still young, knew well the worth of money, and wished not to wait for years to profit by your great inheritance. Perhaps, too, his father urged him. But this is the plan they conceived. Giuseppa, being much in love, let out in some manner to her lover that she had from her mother a secret, a certain poison which killed without any trace whatever, and not immediately, but in the course of time, according to the dose. Swearing her to silence, Vok commanded Giuseppa to prepare the poison and to deliver to him a dose which would begin to act only after several hours, and would not kill before two days. This poison was administered to your father in the hostel at which he stayed in Pilsen, by a servant who was bought, I know not by whose means. The crime was accomplished, and the Baron was carried, dying, to his cousin's house. Suspecting nothing, and touched by the careful nursing he received, the Baron dictated the will that is known to you."

Rugena felt benumbed. She began to breathe heavily; her head turned giddy; and her heart sank in her breast. The father she adored had been treacherously murdered! His murderer was her husband! . . .

"Calm yourself, my daughter," said Brancaccio, alarmed by her looks. "I understand your horror at being united to such a man; and I again repeat to you the promise that you may be freed from him."

"I thank you, my father, that you have thus opened my eyes," murmured Rugena, dully.

"Yet I fear me you will have no strength to hide the secret. And this is necessary until I can send to you from Italy the document confirming the depositions of Giuseppa, which was witnessed in my presence."

Rugena thrust her hair back with her hands and drew herself together. She was terribly white, and her eyes gleamed feverishly.

"Yes, I will be silent, and hide all, for I wish the guilty to be convicted of the murder, and punished with all the severity the law proclaims," she said in a low voice.

"It will be but just. The blood of your father cries out for vengeance from his untimely grave."

Only the grief and despair raging within Rugena's soul could have prevented her from turning with loathing from a servant of Christ's Church who thus preached hate and vengeance instead of mercy. At that moment she had entirely lost all power of judgment, all discernment.

"My father shall be avenged. I will contrive that *he* return not before to-morrow."

At supper that evening Brancaccio was evidently in excellent spirits. But it did not escape Anna's watchfulness that her friend's thoughts were straying, and that her eyes burnt feverishly. To her questions Rugena answered that her head ached, and Anna left the room to fetch some medicine for her. During her absence Brancaccio, unobserved, poured into the young Countess's

goblet something from a little bottle concealed in the palm of his hand.

After supper the Cardinal immediately took leave and departed, and Rugena, pleading headache, retired to her apartments. She felt it, in truth, an imperative necessity to be left alone.

She hastily undressed, and sending every one, even Anna, from her, began feverishly to pace from corner to corner of the room.

She was thinking of her father, recalling him, handsome and full of vigor as he was when he left Rabstein Castle, and she was suddenly possessed by an unreasoning fury. It was for such a scoundrel, who had dared to stretch his bloodstained hands towards her, that she had renounced Jerome and engaged in that cruel moral struggle to forget the man she loved and fulfil that which she had thought to be her duty. Her head swam, and she felt that she was about to swoon.

"I am overheated! I must get quickly into bed," she thought.

Her legs would scarcely obey her, and it was with great difficulty that she reached the bed. She had scarcely lain down upon it when she fell into a deep and heavy sleep.

Quite unexpectedly the two Counts returned home that evening. On hearing that his wife was ill, Vok, not wishing to disturb her, went to a separate sleeping-apartment, where supper was served him; and afterwards—since he also felt strangely unwell—he hastened to go to bed.

Midnight fell, and the inhabitants of the Waldsteins' house were wrapped in deep sleep.

Broda alone was awake, engrossed as usual in the reading of the Scriptures. Suddenly a little stone was flung against his window, followed by a second and a third.

Broda jumped to his feet. This was the night-signal resolved upon by him and Tullia in the case of her wishing to communicate to him something of importance which could not be deferred. He ran down to the house-door, the key of which he kept, and admitted the page, who was pale and out of breath.

"Some danger threatens your young signora," said Tullia, hurriedly. "Thomasso when he returned this evening ordered Bonaventura hastily to proceed to Ilarius to pass the night with him, and at midnight to open the door which leads into the lane. You understand that they can be no good intentions which prompt these wretches to steal into your house, especially during the young Count's absence. I could not hear all, but I heard something about a sleeping mixture administered that none should disturb them. . . ."

"Count Vok hath unexpectedly returned."

"So much the better! Perhaps Bonaventura hath informed the Cardinal of this, for he should be here by now. I was but a few moments in advance of him."

"Wait you here, and I will see what is going forward."

VI

SEIZING his dagger, Broda ran from the room, and hastened, first of all, to Vok. The young Count was fast asleep. That meant that Rugena was alone, and Broda began to shake the sleeper, to warn him that an unexpected visitor was about to enter his house. But all his efforts to awaken Vok were useless, and but for his breathing he might have been taken for dead. Broda, in alarm, was considering what to do further, when suddenly he heard a noise as of some one knocking against furniture in the adjoining room. Instantly he sprang aside and slipped behind the curtain of the bed. Almost at the same moment a small, nimble figure appeared in the doorway and glided like a shadow towards the bed.

To Broda's intense astonishment he recognized Bonaventura. The tiny, sharp, malignant eyes of the monk glanced furtively round the room, and his thin, fox-like face expressed fiendish malice.

Bending over the sleeper he listened to his breathing and lifted one of his hands, which fell back lifelessly on to the coverlet. Then he seized a silken cushion from an armchair at the foot of the bed, and laid it upon his face. Vok gave a slight moan.

But at that moment Broda seized the monk by the neck, dragged him backwards and thrust his dagger into

his throat. Bonaventura fell on to the steps of the dais, without uttering a cry, or relinquishing his hold upon the cushion. Broda, without a glance at him, drew his dagger from the wound, and hastened without delay to the apartments of Rugena.

We have said above that Anna had remarked Rugena's unusually excited condition, and had watched her with some alarm. She had at first been offended by the unaccustomed sharpness of tone with which the Countess had dismissed her, and in a mood of estrangement she repaired to her room and began to undress. But love for her friend and anxiety concerning her welfare prevailed, and, wrapping a wide night-mantle around her, she crept noiselessly to Rugena's room. Through an opening in the curtains she beheld Rugena walking feverishly backwards and forwards, and then creeping slowly towards the bed and falling helplessly upon it. Waiting for a quarter of an hour, Anna silently entered the room and drew near to the bed. The Countess was asleep, breathing with difficulty, and her face, though burning, was as white as death.

"My God! If she is ill again!" murmured Anna, in terror seizing her friend's moist, cold hand.

"A doctor should be summoned, but where shall we find one at such an hour?" she thought in despair. What could she do? Quickly Anna resolved to remain for the night beside the bedside of her friend, and, in case of new and alarming symptoms, to waken Matthias and despatch him for a doctor.

She sat down in the armchair by the bed, and leaning her head upon her hand, began to think of the past, of the future, and of Svietomir, of whom for two years they had heard no tidings.

A neighboring bell striking midnight roused Anna from her thoughts.

"How late it is! But I shall still sit here awhile. Later, I will call Itka to take my place."

After a quarter of an hour Anna fell into a doze.

The sound of light footsteps caused her to open her eyes. She listened in astonishment. For the second time she plainly heard the creak of boards in the corridor leading into the robe-room, where there were trunks and cupboards. She was trying to imagine what the noise could be when the door from the corridor opened, and a tall figure, wrapped in a dark cloak, crept into the room.

Anna froze with terror at sight of the unknown, who promptly threw off his cloak and strode straight towards the bed. Then she recognized him. It was Brancaccio. He was in secular clothes, and the handle of a dagger gleamed in his belt. Such bestial lust was painted on his face that the young girl shuddered from head to foot.

But Anna was courageous by nature, and the excitement gave her fresh courage. She stood firmly before the Cardinal.

"What seek you here in this room? You should not dare to enter at such an unseemly hour. Begone, or I will call for aid!" Vehemently she began to shake Rugena with all her strength, crying aloud:

"Awake! Awake!"

Brancaccio drew back, and a terrible oath escaped him. The presence of a witness at the moment when he was so near the attainment of his object filled him with fury.

"Away, thou serpent! Dare not to stand in my path or I will kill thee!" he hissed, in a voice hoarse with rage.

Then, seeing Anna's vain efforts to awaken Rugena, he laughed maliciously.

"Spend not thy strength, fair Anna. Thou canst not waken her! But as the devil himself hath led thee hither, thou too shalt pay me tribute."

The monstrous thought flashed through his mind that he would violate Anna and then kill her, so as to be assured of her silence. She alone could betray his villainy, so skilfully had everything been thought out beforehand. Seizing Anna he dragged her from the bed, at which she clutched, trying to throw her down. She defended herself desperately; but she could neither scream nor call for help, her throat being paralyzed with terror. Her cries froze on her lips, but her strength appeared to be redoubled, and Brancaccio had need of his adroitness.

Beside himself with rage and malice, the Cardinal tried to draw his stiletto without releasing the young girl from his grasp. His fiery breath scorched her face, and she bit him in the cheek. The terrible pain deprived Brancaccio of all self-control. Drunk with rage he uttered a muffled roar and seized her by the throat.

She fell back, half-stifled. She felt as though her brain were bursting. Horror at the outrage committed upon her was drowned in the unbearable pain. She lost consciousness. . . .

At that moment the door burst open and Broda rushed into the room. One glance sufficed to show him what had happened. With a savage cry he rushed at Brancaccio and plunged his dagger in his back.

The Cardinal dropped to the ground, his arms helplessly spread, and lay motionless. Broda thrust him aside with his foot, and bent over Anna, who was lying as though dead.

"Heavens! What hath happened?" cried Itka, running into the room holding a candle, half-dressed and with her hair hanging in disorder. Looking round, and realizing what had occurred, she dropped the candlestick and covered her face with her hands.

"There will be time for lamentation afterwards, Itka," said Broda, picking up the candle and placing it on the table. "But run, now, and wake Matthias. Tell him to hasten quickly hither to bear away this unhappy girl, and cast forth this swine. Then must we succor our lady, who is sleeping an unnatural sleep," he added, approaching the bed and carefully examining the pale face of Rugena, who lay, as before, in utter unconsciousness of what was proceeding around her.

"Poor lady! 'Twas the spirit of thy father protected thee," he murmured.

After a few moments Matthias appeared, and between them they carried Anna to her room and left her to the care of Itka.

"And now," said Broda, "I will go and awaken the old Count. 'Twill be better to await his orders. Let him himself see where these villains lie, so that later no suspicion may be cast on us."

But before going to the Count Broda returned to his room to tell Tullia of what had occurred.

"Ah! He is dead! At last his soul hath returned to Hell whence it came," she cried joyfully.

"My masters will reward you for the service you have rendered to-night," said Broda, warmly pressing her hand.

Count Ginek and his wife occupied rooms at the opposite end of the palace. When Broda burst in upon them like a hurricane and began to tell them what had happened the old Count at first could not believe his ears, while the Countess understood nothing but that Brancaccio and Bonaventura had both been killed. This seemed to her so frightful that she broke into sobs, shrieks, and abuse, nearly flinging herself upon Broda to strangle him.

But when the Count had made her understand that Broda had saved the life of her son, whom Bonaventura had tried to suffocate, she sprang from her bed, and rushed barefoot to Vok's room. Beholding Bonaventura lying in a pool of blood, still clutching the tell-tale cushion in his hand, while Vok was stretched like a corpse

upon the bed, the Countess fell in a faint and was carried away.

Broda and Matthias had scarcely quitted Rugena's room when Ilarius crept into it, pale and distracted. He fell upon his knees beside Brancaccio and leaning his ear towards the Cardinal's breast laid his trembling hands upon it. Then he shivered and drew himself together. It seemed to him that the heart was beating, though faintly. Without delay he wrapped the Cardinal in his cloak and raising him beneath the armpits dragged him from the room.

He had neared the door when Itka entered to look at Rugena, having given Anna into the care of another servant. She drew aside in silent horror.

Ilarius conveyed the body into his room, and, locking the door behind him, hastened from the house, returning quickly with some monks from the adjacent monastery. They laid the bodies of Bonaventura and the Cardinal upon a stretcher, and carried them away to the Archbishop's palace.

Old Count Waldstein smiled scornfully on learning from Itka that the Cardinal's body had been carried off by Ilarius. It was perhaps better, for otherwise the hideous affair would have awakened much noise in the town. The sight of Anna, who still lay unconscious, filled the Count's heart with wrath and pity.

Rugena awoke late, feeling ill. Her head was as heavy as lead, and her hands and feet seemed frozen. She was

so weak that it was difficult for her to think or remember. Nevertheless, when Itka brought her some milk she at once remarked her nurse's distracted looks, and asked if anything had happened in the house.

"Tell me the truth. I must know all!" she cried commandingly, seeing that the nurse hesitated to answer her question.

Itka dared no longer disobey, and related the incredible events of the night, at first omitting some of the details, but afterwards being more and more carried away by the recital.

Rugena grew red, then white, at hearing of the danger by which she had been threatened, and from which she had escaped merely by chance, and at the price of her friend's dishonor.

"Oh, the villain, the villain! To pest such crimes! God saved me, but Anna, dear Anna is ruined in my stead! What doth she now? I wish to see her. Ah! Why did Broda come too late to save her too?" she cried through her tears.

"Calm yourself, lady! The poor thing sleeps. The physician hath been and hath given her a medicine to send slumber to her. When she came to herself she was like one bereft of reason, and he feared for her brain."

"I will go to her."

"Wait, you are still too weak yourself. Marga Nakhodsky, for whom I sent, is with her now."

When Itka began to speak of the danger that had threatened her husband Rugena cut her short. All her

wrath against Vok and Count Ginek had revived. If the murderers of her father had perished it would have been but just. It never entered Rugena's head in her present state of agitation that such a villain as Brancaccio might have lied. Her conviction of their guilt was even strengthened when she noticed that Itka was embarrassed and turned pale at her words.

"Never mention to me the name of that scoundrel against whom my father's blood cries out!"

"Itka," she added, beside herself, "if thou knowest something of that crime then tell it me. How didst thou dare so long to hide the truth from me, how didst thou dare let me contract that infamous marriage?"

"I know nothing . . ." muttered the old woman in confusion. "Matthias did but suspect the will was false."

At that moment the door opened, and both Counts came into the room. Vok looked pale and distracted, and was leaning on his father's arm. A cold douche with friction had scarcely served to rouse him from his heavy torpor. The story of the night's events had produced a terrible effect on him and had roused him to such a pitch of fury that his father had had difficulty in calming him by the assurance that the culprits had been killed, and had thus paid the penalty for their crimes.

Strengthened by a goblet of old wine, Vok expressed the desire to see his wife. He had never loved her so deeply or sincerely as at that moment when a miracle had preserved her purity from a horrible defilement.

On seeing Rugena pale and distraught, her eyes swollen by the tears which still were coursing down her cheeks, he rushed to her with outstretched arms.

"Calm thyself, my beloved!" he cried and made to draw her to him.

But Rugena could restrain herself no longer. Itka's words concerning the falsity of the will still sounded in her ears and seemed to support Brancaccio's accusation. Every nerve in her body quivered, and, in her feverish imagination her father's spirit stood between her and her husband.

"Touch me not!" she cried, wrenching herself free with an expression of such horror that Vok stopped in bewilderment and dropped his arms.

"Rugena! Recollect thyself! Thou art raving!"

"Not so; but my blindness hath departed. Let me go back to Rabstein. I cannot stay another hour beneath thy roof."

The Counts exchanged astonished glances. It was clear they thought her mad. Rugena understood their looks, and this caused a new convulsion in her tortured soul.

"Oh no, I am not mad! But I know the whole truth about my father's death, and no longer will I be the wife of a man who could be incited by his father to kill mine," she muttered brokenly.

For a moment the Counts were petrified; then Vok's face flushed and he seized Rugena's hand and pressed it till it hurt her.

"What meanest thou?" he said hoarsely. "Explain thyself! Such accusations must be proved."

"There is proof uncontestable—the confession of thy former mistress, Giuseppa—though it hath not yet reached my hands. But for thee it is enough to know that she hath made full confession of the poisoning she accomplished at thine instigation."

Vok grew deadly white and dropped her hand.

"I will contrive that strictest investigation lay bare the circumstances of Baron Rabstein's death," he said in a voice trembling with anger, with his wrathful gaze fixed on his wife. "And God be my witness, I will not keep thee in a murderer's house. Thou mayest freely depart and live in any of thy castles. But that thou canst count me capable of such villainy is a mortal insult, and I will have thee answer for it when the truth shall be revealed."

He took the arm of the old Count, who had also listened with indignation to the accusation leveled at them, and drew him from the room, with the words:

"Come, father. Here we have nothing more to do."

VII

Left to herself, Rugena sank into an armchair, and her terrible nervous tension was dissolved by a flood of tears. Her husband's astonishment and indignation had been so sincere that her belief in his guilt was involuntarily shaken. Yet the crime had certainly been committed by somebody.

When she grew somewhat calmer and her tears had ceased she insisted in spite of her weakness upon going to Anna.

Before she had succeeded in gaining the door a servant entered to announce the arrival of John Hus.

"Ah, Father John! God Himself hath sent thee to enlighten me and guide me in the maze of doubts in which I am involved," said Rugena, eagerly, stretching out both hands to her confessor, who also seemed much agitated.

"Broda hath been with me and informed me of what hath happened here," he said, sitting down near Rugena. Passing his hand across his face he added sadly: "That a servant of the altar should commit such iniquities! But speak, my daughter! I will strive to calm thy spirit."

In a voice trembling with emotion Rugena repeated all that Brancaccio had told her about her father's death,

not concealing the fact that the indignation of her husband and his father when she had cast the accusation in their faces had seemed to her unfeigned.

"In whom can I believe? In what? I am astray in this tissue of lies and infamies!" Rugena concluded, bursting into tears.

Hus listened to her in agitation, and suddenly he remembered the suspicions expressed by Jerome on the occasion of Baron Rabstein's strange and unexpected death.

"At the present moment I can but say that it is permissible to doubt whether truth can spring from such a polluted source as Brancaccio," he answered after some consideration. "The Cardinal's passion for you explains his intent—that of sowing dissension 'twixt wife and husband. The guilt of the two Counts is hardly credible. For notwithstanding their purely human failings they are worthy people and good Christians. I fear me you have acted inconsiderately in accusing your husband of such an awful crime! 'Tis a grievous offense, especially if undeserved. Be not agitated," he added, seeing that the Countess had turned pale; "this sordid mystery will of a certainty be unraveled, and God will grant that the true culprit be revealed. In the mean time, pray, my daughter! Believe me that in the souls of the faithful is no place for gloom and repining. True prayer issues from the heart like a radiant beam of light which illumines the darkness of doubt and points out to us the path of duty. I will go to poor Anna now, and endeavor to soothe her."

Hus then made his way into Anna's room. At sound of the voice of the preacher so beloved by all Anna gave a wild cry and buried her face in the pillow. Hus sat down by the bedside and took her hand. Her whole body was shaken by her violent sobs.

"From me, poor child, thou needest to hide nothing," Hus said gently. "In my eyes, as in those of all just and honest men, thou wilt ever be the victim of an abominable outrage. But though never so heavy thy fate, canst thou imagine for a moment that God hath forgotten and deserted thee? He doth but try thee, and thou must believe that everything sent by Him is sent for good. Thou must submit thyself beneath His hand, and not blaspheme and seek refuge in self-destruction. He, the Almighty, who doth ordain the fate of man, alone doth know the reason of all reasons, and hath already judged thy torturer, calling him before His face."

For a moment Anna straightened her body.

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, I have heard so."

"Ah, why did he die? Who dared to kill him before I with mine own hands did strangle him, gloating over his agony?"

With her tightly clenched hands, her bloodshot eyes, and the distorted smile which drew the lips back from her white teeth, Anna indeed was terrible to look upon.

Hus clasped her hand and gazed imperatively into her feverishly burning eyes.

"'*Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,*' said the Lord,

and His judgment is more terrible than that of man. Christ forgave His enemies and prayed for His torturers. Darest thou now, with a heart filled with hate and thirsting for revenge, fall before the Cross of Christ and beg for mercy?" said Hus, sternly.

Anna shuddered, and, as though overwhelmed by a transport of rage, dropped back helplessly amid the pillows.

Hus fell on his knees beside the bed and placed his hand upon her burning forehead. Raising his eyes to the Crucifix upon the wall he began to pray fervently, and it seemed as though healing strength flowed from his hands.

Anna's agitation little by little subsided, and bitter tears trickled silently down her pale cheeks.

At length her tears, too, were exhausted, and she fell into a deep sleep.

Making sure that the unhappy girl was indeed asleep Hus rose, and after a few moments spent in further silent prayer, noiselessly went out of the room.

Marga was awaiting him in the room adjoining.

"Well?" she asked anxiously.

"She sleeps, and will, I hope, awaken calmer and more resigned. Tell her that I will come to her to-morrow, after dinner."

He was leaving the house when he was overtaken by a little page, who begged him to return for a moment to the young Count's room.

When Hus entered, Vok was pacing backwards and

forwards, frowning and excited. Count Ginek, whose face was also agitated, sat by the window. He had just at that moment called to mind the fleeting suspicion which had awakened in him at news of his cousin's unexpected death, knowing himself to be entirely innocent of participation in any crime, if indeed one had been committed.

"I desired to beg your counsel in a matter of great difficulty," said Vok, pressing his hand.

"I can guess of what you would speak. The Lady Rugena hath told me of the fiendish device of Brancaccio which hath entirely confounded her."

"But the matter must be sifted! What did the villain say?" interrupted Count Ginek.

Hus repeated everything he had heard from Rugena.

"If you would hear my counsel," he added, "question Matthias. I think that he perhaps may give you some indications."

"I will straightway order him to be summoned. The most terrible thing of all is that Giuseppa was indeed my mistress, but the rest is—an insufferable lie! And Brancaccio himself must needs expire at the most critical moment without unraveling this web of his own weaving. . . ."

But Vok was mistaken. Brancaccio was not dead. Broda's mighty hand would, of course, have despatched him on the spot had the prudent Italian not been wearing a fine coat of mail beneath his clothes. Nevertheless, the

blow he had received was so powerful that the dagger, although its point was broken, had deeply embedded some of the steel rings in the Cardinal's flesh. The pain had been terrible so that Brancaccio had, for a time, lost consciousness, and Broda had taken him for dead.

The Archbishop was afraid to keep him in his palace, and he was immediately conveyed to the Strakhovsky Monastery. There he at length recovered consciousness, and the Abbot, who regarded the Cardinal's amorous adventure with an indulgent eye, surrounded his distinguished guest with all possible attentions. Bonaventura, though, was dead, and had been secretly buried.

When Matthias appeared and the Count ordered him to reveal unreservedly everything he knew concerning the death of his master, the old man was evidently afraid, and stood silent in confusion, until both Counts succeeded in convincing him of the necessity for them to learn the truth. Then he told everything he knew, and expressed the suspicion that Baron Svietomir had been poisoned by the supper served to him by some unknown waiting-woman at the inn.

The former servant fell ill of a sudden, and the innkeeper said that the new one had been recommended to him by some priest in Pilson. She served there but for a week, and then left, and disappeared, leaving no trace.

"The criminal hand, it seems, is found. It remains but to discover by whom it was directed," Vok remarked.

"I have a notion as to that . . ." began Matthias, and then again fell silent.

"Speak! speak!" cried both Counts together.

"During the first month when I lived with you at the castle I was once returning thither from a neighboring village when I heard the sound of voices in the bushes near old Khvala's mill. One voice sounded to me like that of Father Ilarius, and, out of curiosity, I hid and watched. It was indeed he, and with him was a girl, in whom I recognized the servant who had taken the Baron his supper. But I never saw her later."

Vok glanced gloomily at his father.

"If Ilarius be implicated in this crime it means that my mother hath protected him. But I hope, my father, that this will not hinder thee in searching for the truth."

"In no way! I myself desire to learn the truth, and if Jan be guilty I will force her to confess."

" 'Tis difficult to force my mother, especially since she hath been ill, they tell me. Should we rather not seek to overhear some secret conversation betwixt her and the monk. Perhaps in view of all that hath occurred they may let drop words that will give us some indication as to what further steps to take."

"It is not good to peep and overhear," said Hus.

"True, Father John, it is not good. But to be unjustly accused of murder is still worse! All means are good enough to prove my innocence," said Vok in a tone of displeasure.

"I think I can contrive that which thou dost desire," said the old Count, thoughtfully. "I remember that adjoining thy mother's oratory is a secret hiding-place from whence one can see and hear everything, and even enter if necessary. My grandfather constructed it, and my father showed it me when I married Jan. Not once have I made use of it, for 'tis not in my nature—and little did I dream in what sad manner it would prove of service," he added, sighing deeply. "Go, Matthias, learn if Ilarius be now at home and with the Countess; and come forthwith to tell us."

A quarter of an hour passed. Hus and the Counts were deliberating upon what they had just heard when Matthias returned. He wore a preoccupied air, and announced that Ilarius had just come home for the first time since he had carried off the Cardinal, and that he was now closeted with Countess Jan.

"No time must be lost! Come with us, Father John. I wish you to be witness. And thou, Vok, go fetch Rugena."

Rugena lay, half reclining, in an armchair. Her head felt heavy, and, physically and mentally, she was broken.

The entrance of her husband disturbed her, and she slowly raised herself in the chair.

"Come with me! Perhaps we shall learn who was thy father's murderer," Vok said dryly.

But she shook her head. He seized her by the arm.

"At once shalt thou come! Since thou didst incline

thine ears to a perfidious monk and cast accusation of murder at me and my father, thou shalt now, willy nilly, proceed to the end! Dost thou hear me?"

Rugena rose silently, and, though her head swam, followed Vok into the old Count's presence, where the sight of Hus somewhat reassured her. They all four repaired to Count Ginek's study. Here the Count pressed a spring in the wall, and a door hidden by a huge iron chest immediately opened, revealing a rather long, narrow passage. This passage apparently penetrated the thickness of the wall, and led into a small chamber, where the only light was that given through several chinks in the solid stone. Old Waldstein carefully placed Rugena and his son and Hus near these chinks, which proved to be nothing less than small picked holes, and which were concealed upon the other side by the frame of a large picture hanging in the oratory itself.

The voices of the Countess and her confessor could be plainly heard. Rugena, trembling with excitement, placed her eye to one of the holes, and discovered that she could see and hear everything.

The oratory was a spacious room. The reading-desk was placed straight opposite the traitorous picture. There were two folding-chairs, an armchair, and a finely encrusted table with a drawer in it. At the end of the room could be seen the fireplace, near which the Countess sat, muffled up and shivering. She was ill, having caught cold on the night when she ran barefoot to the apartment of her son.

Her yellowish face expressed uneasiness. Opposite her, with his hands behind him, stood Ilarius. He seemed thinner and shrunken, and his little roving eyes looked apprehensive.

"I will answer all your questions later, my daughter. But first it is necessary to consider one highly important circumstance which threatens us with fearful danger. I knew of it already yesterday, but too late to speak to you about it, and the events of the night have kept me from home till now. To be brief I will but say that the Cardinal hath revealed to Rugena the secret of her father's violent death."

"Impossible!" cried the Countess, turning pale.

"I have it from Bonaventura, and from Maria, the young Countess's handmaid. She is favorably disposed to me and doth acquaint me with all that may be of interest to me. The fact in itself is indisputable; but the Cardinal hath named your son and husband as instigators and perpetrators of the crime."

"But why such a lie? Ginek was in Prague then, and Vok in Waldstein. Thomasso must in truth have lost his head to hang this ancient coil about our necks, when it was long forgotten, and was at the time contrived so skilfully that no one had the least suspicion. 'Tis on his part the worse, since I paid him liberally for the remission of the sin."

" 'Tis true the matter was well managed! But once the devil hath inspired Monsignor Thomasso with a carnal passion for your daughter-in-law and prompted him to

reveal the truth to her, thereby to separate her from her husband, this same devil may well have another surprise in store for us!"

"In truth I know not what there is to please men in that pale face. Concerning Rabstein, I think that your fears are vain, Father Ilarius. There are no proofs. The Cardinal assured me that the poison would leave no traces, and nobody hath seen. . . ."

"God hath seen!" thundered a terrible voice.

The frame and picture moved aside and opened the hiding-place, from whence Vok leapt forth and flinging himself upon Ilarius dragged him backwards and placed his dagger at his throat.

The Countess shrieked. She was so overwhelmed with amazement at the sudden appearance of her son that at first she did not notice the opening in the wall. Rushing up to Vok she tried to wrench the dagger from him.

"Thou art mad! How darest thou thus assault my confessor and violate my solitude?" she cried.

But Count Ginek dragged her away from Vok, and thrust her to the wall.

"We have heard on what thou hast deliberated in thy *solitude!*"

"Speak, thou scurvy dog! Confess thy villainy, or I will pluck out thine eyes," roared Vok, and his dagger flashed before the face of the monk, who was half dead with terror.

But Hus hastened to him and drew away his hand.

" 'Twere best to promise him his life if he avow all,

and not to stain thy hands with his contemptible blood," he said.

"You are right, Father John! Let him go to the devil if he will but confess," interrupted the old Count. "Free him, Vok, and let him speak."

Ilarius fell on his knees, trembling with fear, his eyes protruding from his head.

"Will you promise me not to touch me if I tell you all?" he whimpered.

"We swear," answered both Counts together.

Then Ilarius, in a shaking voice, related the details of the poisoning of Baron Svietomir, and what he knew of Brancaccio's plan to delude Rugena with hopes of a divorce in order to entice her to Italy. But Bonaventura had decided otherwise. Suspecting Vok of responsibility for his beating, he suddenly conceived the notion of profiting by the young Count's unexpected return to make an end of him. He had no poison, nothing but a sleeping-draught prepared by him for Brancaccio which the servant Maria mixed with the food served to the Count for his supper. "Instead of being divorced she will be widowed," said Bonaventura to himself. But Anna's presence in Rugena's room frustrated the plans that had been so well devised.

"Well," said the Count, as Ilarius finished his story and wiped the sweat from his face. "Now begone, thou rascal! Set not thy foot in my house again, and draw not nigh to my estates, or my people shall hang thee like a dog!"

Ilarius jumped up and disappeared through the door with an alacrity which at any other time would have amused the spectators.

The Countess Jan, throughout the whole course of her spiritual father's long confession, had stood as immovable as a statue. Her self-possession, it seemed, had returned to her, and she kept her forbidding gaze, full of hatred, upon Rugena, who had been sobbing during the narration of the terrible story.

When Ilarius had disappeared Count Ginek went up to his wife and measured her with a scornful glance.

"I have freed my house from one monster, but what am I to do with thee, abandoned woman? With thee who hast dared draw near me and fondle my innocent child, thy soul guilty of murder, a murder doubly terrible for being that of one so close akin to us. Thou canst have no shame, and remorse of conscience cannot touch thee. But hast thou no fear of what shall come after death? Dost thou not tremble at the thought of appearing before thy God, thy hands stained by the blood of the unhappy Svietomir?"

The Countess proudly drew up her head.

"I have naught wherewith to reproach myself," she said with assurance. "That which I did was done through a mother's love, to assure a brilliant future for my son. I am at peace, for my conscience accuses me not, and I shall stand fearless before the throne of God. . . ."

"Either thou art mad or thou hast lost all conception

of God and of His judgment," the Count interrupted, full of wrath.

"Nay, I am not mad, and my faith shall save me; and the pardon of Christ's substitute who hath power to bind and loosen upon earth shall ope the gates of Heaven to me. Look!"

And she ran to the table and opened the drawer with a key which hung from her waist-belt. Drawing forth a sheet of folded parchment she held it out to her husband.

"Read, thou shameless one. This is a full indulgence not only for myself, but for thee too, ungrateful man, and e'en for my posterity. Dost thou understand now the injustice of thy accusations?"

Those present looked with horror at the Countess. She boldly and tranquilly returned their gaze.

"Ah, thou hast an indulgence! How could I have forgot that shield which covers every villainy?" said the Count, with a bitter smile. He unfolded the parchment and began to read it, mockingly accentuating every word.

Then suddenly, consumed with fury, he flung the document into the fire, with the words:

"Thus do I value this devilish compact, drawn up 'twixt Antichrist and Satan to ruin souls and prompt fools to iniquities!"

The Countess with a wild shriek clutched her head with her hands. For a second she stood motionless, her mouth open with terror, staring at the parchment which was blackening and writhing in the flames. Then she rushed to the fireplace and bent over the fire. Careless both of

heat and danger she endeavored to rescue the precious parchment, which, she was assured, would save her from punishment. The wide sleeves of her dress took fire, and Vok and Hus rushed forward to draw her back, and extinguish the smoldering material. But she herself, as though noticing nothing, continued to gaze fixedly at the burning parchment.

When nothing was left of it but ashes the Countess sank to the floor, and with an almost inhuman cry began writhing in terrible convulsions. Her strength was such that the three men could do nothing with her, and were obliged to summon Broda, with whose help she was at length carried away. But her piercing shrieks resounded throughout the building.

Rugena in terror sought the protection of Hus, who, though himself painfully disturbed, endeavored to calm her.

Vok and the old Count were too overcome to speak.

"Dear Lord," sighed Hus, crossing himself, "what a fearful example of the fatal influence of these indulgences! Is it not the duty of every honest man to struggle perpetually, according to the measure of his strength, against such an abuse of the simple-hearted faith of men? The unhappy Countess, blinded by her fanaticism, was overwhelmed at beholding the destruction of that piece of parchment with its revolting lies. Yet none who are thus deceived ask why Christ spake not of documents so momentous if really they have significance in Heaven?"

"Such delusions are in truth most frightful," said Count Ginek with a sigh, and then, turning to Rugena, he remarked bitterly:

"Thou seest that Vok and I are guiltless of thy father's death. Yet, alack, we are powerless to remedy the consequences of the crime."

"Forgive me, father, for my unjust offense. But I was overwrought, and I believed what I was told," she answered in a low voice.

"Of a truth, what proofs were needful when such a model of virtue as Brancaccio denounced such reprobates as I and my father! 'Tis proof sufficient," remarked Vok, scathingly, and without glancing at his wife went from the room.

Rugena flushed, but before she could answer Broda appeared, profiting by an interval of peace, and reminded them of the presence of Tullia, who had rendered them such signal services.

" 'Tis true! I had nearly forgot her. We are indeed most deeply indebted to the unhappy girl," said the Count. "Speak with her, Rugena; and tell her that if she desireth to return to Italy I will despatch her thither with a trusty escort and assure her future. If she would rather stay with us my house shall afford her shelter till the day of her death."

Tullia was sitting mournful and absorbed in thought when Rugena approached. At sight of the Countess, Tullia jumped up, and fell on her knees before her. But Rugena embraced the girl tenderly and in the warmest

terms expressed the gratitude of the whole family, and told of the Count's proposition.

"Let me stay with you, signora! No near soul is left to me now in the fatherland. Believe me, I will serve you faithfully," answered Tullia, with tears in her eyes.

"You shall stay with us, sweetheart; but as a friend, not as a servant," Rugena answered kindly. "Come, I will make arrangements for thee, and give thee woman's clothing. Throw off this garb, and forget thy terrible past. God in His infinite goodness may yet send thee happiness and peaceful days."

VIII

Two months had passed since Tullia had come to live at the Waldsteins'. She had grown completely accustomed to her new life, and had gained universal favor by her amiable character and her eagerness to be of use. She felt inexpressibly happy, and the way in which she was treated by the Count's family, and by Anna and Hus, raised her in her own estimation, and awakened in her breast new hopes for the future.

Their affection for her was increased by the knowledge of her sad story.

One evening Anna, who had not yet quite recovered, went early to bed. Rugena sat near the bedside, while Tullia placed herself upon a cushion at its foot. Suddenly Anna asked what made her hate Brancaccio so much, and how it was that she had become his mistress.

Tullia shuddered and turned pale at the remembrance of the past of which she was now reminded. Anna and Rugena, touched by her evident emotion, declared that they did not wish her to tell them anything, but Tullia herself had begun to feel the need of pouring forth her soul, and relating the events of her short but troubled life.

She was the eldest daughter of a master goldsmith in Bologna, and with her sisters had been brought up by an old aunt. Their life had been peaceful and happy. She was turned fifteen when misfortune descended upon the

family. One morning her aunt had sent her with a message to her father, at his workshop, where he always received important clients and visitors. On this particular morning a highly placed member of the priesthood was with him, having come to order a costly chalice for the Cardinal-Legate of Bologna, Baldassare Cossa. This visitor, who appeared to be Brancaccio, never removed his eyes from Tullia's beautiful face, and from that day she could not move a step without meeting the Bishop.

One day an unknown woman accosted her in the street, and began to tell her of the passionate love with which she had inspired a distinguished member of the priesthood, embellishing her words with all sorts of promises on the condition of her becoming his mistress. Tullia refused with disgust, but this had no effect upon the woman, who persisted in urging her proposals, even entering their house, which she watched, as soon as the aunt was observed to leave it. But at last, one day the father found her there, and, giving her a thorough beating, flung her out into the street.

After that several weeks passed quietly, until at last one day the City Guard appeared at the house. They proceeded to arrest the goldsmith, upon the pretext that he had inserted false jewels in the work upon the chalice, instead of the real ones which had been entrusted to him for the purpose.

Tullia, highly agitated, had reached this point in her story when she halted to take breath.

"How can I describe our despair? Our father was

cast into prison in spite of vowing and protesting his innocence! His affairs were thrown into disorder, for all our property was distrained in compensation for the jewels, supposed to have been stolen.

"Once, when leaving the prison, where in vain I had besought an interview with my father, I met that shameless woman, she with a mocking laugh declared that I 'had not knocked at the right door,' meaning thereby that nothing but Brancaccio's influence with the Cardinal-Legate could save my father.

"For long I could not summon resolution to go and beseech that man, whom, I know not why, I held to be the principal author of our misfortune; but at last I was compelled to do so. We were reduced to beggary, and my aunt and little sisters had fallen ill from grief and deprivation.

"Brancaccio received me kindly, but to my prayers he answered smiling:

" 'One favor for another! Accept my love and I will save the old thief.'

" 'He is no thief! He put the rightful brilliants in the chalice! God knows who changed them!' I answered indignantly.

" 'If thou canst prove that, my daughter,' said he, 'why comest thou to petition me? But make good haste, for I warn thee that thy father will be put to torture to extort confession from him, and will afterwards be hanged.'

"I thought I should go mad, and it seemed to me a

trifle then to sacrifice my life to save my family. I answered that I would agree, yet demanded some token that he would not deceive me and execute my father. He laughed and praised my forethought, saying that I should not enter his service till the prisoner were set at liberty. A few days later I learnt that my father had escaped and settled in another town under a false name. My aunt and sisters repaired to that same town, while I entered Brancaccio's service as a page. From the first he declared to me that he would not lose my family from sight, and at his slightest displeasure with me would seize my father and punish him twofold—for theft and for flight.

"I bore my cross submissively, and he sported with me as doth a cat with a mouse. He was diverted at my endeavors to hide my loathing from him. Then something occurred which turned that loathing into a hatred I cannot describe. . . .

"I was about to become a mother, which filled him with wrath, yet he would not risk my health, for, it seemed, I pleased him. When my condition would suffer me no longer to fulfil my rôle he sent me to a villa in the suburbs, where I lived alone, with an old woman to guard me, and where my son was born. I loved the babe passionately, and the servant, who had grown attached to me, promised that he should be sent to my father and my aunt to be brought up. From this old Nutsi I learnt much concerning the Cardinal and my predecessors, who had always disappeared in secret, that none might learn what had become of them.

"Once Nutsi and I sat and talked in front of the fire. Suddenly *he* arrived unexpectedly, and was enraged at sight of the child upon my knee.

" 'Nutsi, thou old fool!' he said, 'thou wert mad to keep this brat alive to be a source of trouble to us! Did I not tell thee that I did not want him? . . .'

"And before I could prevent it he had seized the babe from me and flung him in the fire. . . .

"Seeing the rosy little arms and legs struggling helpless in the flames I fainted, and for many weeks hung between death and madness. . . .

"Then health returned to me, though slowly, and, to my misfortune—beauty. . . . There are no words to tell of the hatred I felt towards Brancaccio, yet, knowing my helplessness, I hid my feelings, awaiting that moment when I could take vengeance. . . . You know the rest," Tullia concluded, wiping away the tears that were streaming down her face.

In deep silence Anna and Rugena listened to this story, which was only interrupted from time to time by Tullia's sobs.

"My God!" Rugena cried, when she had finished; "and this monster doth dare with his foul hands to administer the holy sacraments! Why doth no bolt from Heaven strike him down before the altar?"

"Ask rather how priests like Brancaccio, and a Pope like John XXIII—thieves and scoundrels both—dare to excommunicate a *saint* like Master John!" Anna exclaimed, indignantly.

THE news that the Pope had ordered Hus to be laid under an interdict if he failed to make submission within twenty days delighted his enemies, and as this stern measure of the Holy See was not openly opposed by the King their arrogance increased.

The Council of the Old Place consisted at that time mostly of Germans; and under its auspices a meeting of townsmen, also Germans, took place. At this meeting it was decided to attack the Bethlehem Chapel, to drive away the worshipers, and to seize the preacher himself without waiting for the publication of the interdict.

October 2nd, a church festival in Prague, had arrived. A considerable number of armed burghers gathered together in the morning, headed by the traitorous Bohemian, Bernard Khotek, and by Ginz Leinhardt, who was really the instigator of the contemplated onslaught. The butcher's son, in his blind hatred of the Bohemians, thirsted to tear from their midst the man so beloved by them, the incarnation of their dreams of national regeneration.

The Bethlehem Chapel was filled by worshipers who were following the words of Hus with that rapturous faith which he knew how to arouse in the hearts of his listeners. Suddenly several persons rushed into the building, with cries:

"The Germans have surrounded the chapel and are attacking us with spears and halberds!"

For a moment the congregation was dumb with astonishment, but then a sudden tumult arose. From without came the sounds of shouts, oaths, and the clash of weapons of the attackers who were endeavoring to force their way into the chapel.

But before a general panic could prevail several knights and noblemen, among them Vok von Waldstein, had leapt on to their benches, crying out:

"Women and children stay in your places. Men press forward to defend the chapel, without bloodshed if it be possible!"

All able-bodied Bohemians rushed to the entry. The Germans, who had succeeded in gaining the porch, were thrown back, and a wall of defenders of the sacred building, silent, but firm and composed, arose before them. Seeing that their efforts to take the chapel unawares had failed, and disconcerted by the threatening calm of their opponents, the Germans fell back. In vain Ginz, foaming at the mouth with rage, tried to rally his followers and urge them to force a way into the church. Khotek and the majority of the burghers feared a fight within it, and noisily made their way back to the town hall.

The town council gathered, and after a stormy sitting decided that at least the chapel itself should be destroyed, according to the injunction which had come from Rome.

On the evening of the same day Hus was at the Waldsteins'. Even his mild soul was dismayed by the infa-

mous attack of the morning, and he could not restrain his indignation.

"This," he said, "is an example of the effrontery of the Germans. They would not dare destroy a neighbor's oven against the King's will; yet they presume to outrage God's temple!"

"Oh, we will protect the chapel! Let the German dogs but try another time if they would feel the weight of our fists!" cried Vok, boiling with rage. "I fear but for you, Master John. These filthy priests will now begin to persecute you unceasingly."

"I have already been summoned to the Bishop to declare whether I had submitted to the apostolic order."

"And what did you answer?"

A sad smile appeared upon the face of Hus.

"From my heart I answered. . . ."

But seeing the general impatience he continued:

"*Apostolic* I call the injunctions of Christ's apostles and I am ready to obey the Pope in so far as his decrees are in accordance with the Savior's teachings. But when they oppose them I will not listen, though I be confronted with the stake."

"Master John, you run a fearful risk!" said Rugena with a sympathetic pressure of his hand.

"Everything will be according to the will of God, my daughter; but I think the hour hath not yet sounded! Christ hath not finished the work with which He charged me and my brethren, and hath not snatched from Behemoth's jaws all those destined by the Lord for salva-

tion. He will strengthen the bearers of good tidings until they have at length crushed the head of Behemoth! With all my heart I strive for that, and for that I will humbly embrace my death. . . ."

"Such a life doth make you worthy of the crown of sainthood," said Anna; and her eyes, which had looked dull and passionless since her sorrow, suddenly flashed with fanatical excitement.

"Refrain, my daughter, from the use of such bold words; and above all do not audaciously transfer the gratitude we owe to God for leading and sustaining us to His unworthy servant," Hus said sternly.

Notwithstanding the passionate desire of the Germans to destroy the Bethlehem Chapel, they were obliged to deny themselves the joy, for the people kept watch night and day over their beloved place of worship.

In all the churches of Prague it was solemnly announced that services would be suspended until Hus had left the town, and that all Christians were forbidden, under threat of the like excommunication, to speak to him, offer him food or drink, afford him shelter, bury him, and so forth.

A threatening cloud seemed to hang above the ancient capital of Bohemia. A sinister and melancholy spirit was abroad, as though the town had just been visited by some most terrible catastrophe. The bells no longer rang, the churches were closed and no services were held in them. The dying were denied the sacraments, the newly-

born their baptism, the newly-wed God's blessing, and the dead Christian burial.

Yet for the most part the population were unshaken by this fearful chastisement, and unwavering in their love for Hus. The general indignation was directed at the priesthood known by the people to be envious and depraved, who thus revenged themselves upon an idolized preacher for having boldly revealed their greed, venality, and cunning.

During this time of suffering Hus gave proof of that mild, unmurmuring steadfastness which was one of the most striking features of his character. He invoked none but Christ, the true head of the Church, concerning the unjust punishment with which he had been visited; and for the rest continued to lead his usual life; visiting the sick and suffering, preaching the true gospel, and on every occasion betraying that burning faith, that self-forgetfulness, which conquered the hearts of all contemporaries and created for posterity one of the most fascinating figures in history.

X

MEANWHILE, we return to the Waldstein family.

The old Count and his son spent the greater part of their time with the King at Jerbrak Castle, and Rugena and Anna lived in retirement, scarcely leaving the house, partly on account of mourning, and partly because their state of mind inclined them to solitude.

Anna had not yet quite recovered from the terrible shock she had sustained. Apart from the agonizing headaches she suffered at times she felt physically better, but her appearance and character were strikingly changed. Her pretty little face had become somehow longer, had lost its freshness and grown pale. Her eyes, formerly so bright and joyous, were dull and clouded by grief, and would only shine occasionally under the influence of some wild excitement. Her open-hearted gaiety, her love of fun, and her sociability had entirely disappeared and been replaced by gloomy, silent reserve. Dressed perpetually in black, almost in the garb of a nun, she passed whole hours in prayer. She avoided meeting people, and nothing could persuade her to leave her room when guests came to the house.

Discord had reigned between Rugena and her husband since that ill-fated morning following Brancaccio's attempt. Vok had been mortally insulted by the accusa-

tion cast against him, and could not forgive his wife for having suspected him of murder. The fall of God's vengeance upon his mother, and the subsequent terrible death of the Countess had made a painful impression upon him. He lost his taste for adventure and became gloomy, silent, and irritable, sometimes seeking a quarrel with Rugena, but generally obstinately avoiding her.

This estrangement from his wife, which he maintained through stubbornness and wounded self-esteem, was painful to Vok, who, in spite of his impulsive nature, was deeply attached to his wife, and as greatly fascinated by her beauty as before.

He was especially mortified because Rugena, who had asked his father's pardon, considered it superfluous to address to him one word of penitence or regret. Rugena herself understood very well that she was wrong, and that she ought to make amends for the terrible accusation which had proved to be so completely undeserved; but she was too proud and unbending to ask forgiveness.

Such was the position of things at the time of Hus's departure. During his last conversation with Rugena, when they had touched upon the disagreement between her and her husband, Hus had earnestly endeavored to decipher her state of mind and to discover whether her guilty love for Jerome had not something to do with her cruelty to Vok.

"I have forever renounced all earthly love for him," she answered. "But I shall never cease to take delight in him as a man of learning who loves his country, and as

a knight! Nor shall I cease to follow him afar with my sympathy and to pray for him. God will not count that a sin against me!"

At last she had consented to ask Vok's forgiveness.

One evening Rugena had been sitting in her friend's room. Both Counts were away, and there was a strong feeling of unrest in the city that night. Several funeral processions passed the house, and from the crowds accompanying them arose the sounds of oaths mingled with sobs and suppressed weeping. Groups of men-at-arms patrolled the streets. In a word, there was an impression of something sinister in the air.

With a feeling of alarm Rugena left her apartments and went to Anna's room, which overlooked the courtyard, so that sounds from the street could not reach it. But when the abbey bell struck one, she rose to return to her bedroom. She did not feel inclined to sleep, but she was tired.

As she passed through the long corridor to reach her room she saw her husband mounting the staircase which led from the lower story, accompanied by an armor-bearer, carrying a torch. Vok was pale and evidently very tired. His face wore the sullen and gloomy expression which of late had become habitual.

On seeing his wife the Count stopped short, in astonishment.

"Not yet asleep, at such a late hour? Why so?" he asked coldly, looking suspiciously at her.

"I have been chattering with Anna, and did not note

how late it grew," answered Rugena. "Wilt thou not sup?" she asked after a silence. "We were not expecting thee, and the servants are asleep. But there is food awaiting me in my room of which I have no need."

"I am in truth hungered by my long ride, and I would gladly eat if it will not disturb thee," Vok said hesitatingly.

"Disturb me? In no way! Come, and while Simon disarms thee I will light the fire."

They entered a small room adjoining the sleeping apartment of Rugena, and the armor-bearer, having taken off Vok's armor, retired. On the table in the bedroom lay some cold meats, cakes and milk. Rugena took a flagon of wine from the cupboard and lit the candelabra.

Vok sat down at the table and cut some slices of venison for his wife and for himself. They ate in silence. There was a sense of constraint between them, and attempts at conversation failed.

Vok, in spite of his hunger and thirst, ate little. He drank a cup of wine, then put aside his knife and rose.

"A good night to thee, and my thanks! Thou hast sat late with Anna and I will detain thee no longer."

"I am afeared to go to bed. The noise in the street is ceaseless," Rugena answered in a low voice.

Vok said nothing, and made towards the door. An expression of inward struggle appeared upon Rugena's face, and just as her husband reached the door she timidly pronounced his name.

"Vok!"

He stopped immediately and turned towards her, fixing his gloomy, abstracted glance upon her agitated face.

"What wouldst thou?" he asked, coldly.

She ran to him and took his hand.

"Forgive me, Vok, that I offended thee unjustly by my base suspicions. But on that fearful day my soul was steeped in blood, and the thought that I was wife to a man who had helped to kill my father was so intolerable that I lost all measure."

Her beautiful face flushed and paled by turns, and her bright eyes, full of tears, looked appealingly at her husband. Vok's anger melted in an instant.

He drew her to him impulsively, and imprinted a passionate kiss upon her trembling lips.

"Ah, wicked one! And wast thou not ashamed to withhold thine acknowledgment so long? Was it so difficult to say to thy husband: 'I repent me for accounting thee a villain'?"

Putting his arm around her he led her to a seat covered with cushions and sat down beside her.

"Thou didst wish to punish me for my former antics," he said with a return of his old gaiety. "I will confess that I have sometimes been a sorry husband; but for the future I swear to be true to thee, and to sit at home like a rabbit in its burrow."

Rugena could not help laughing.

"Thou hast well pictured thyself: 'a faithful husband,' and above all: 'a rabbit in its burrow'!"

"In sooth, it is not easy. The devil is strong, and doth

sow temptations in our path. Thou canst not understand, because thy modesty and thy pure soul make thee unassailable. Wrapped in thy stainless virtue thou dost judge severely, and thou hast full right to do so!"

At these last words of her husband Rugena's cheeks were dyed by a flush of shame at the remembrance of the guilty kisses she had exchanged with Jerome, and how near she had been to a fall, to flight from her husband's house, and the betrayal of her duty. Her soul was tortured by remorse. Her agitation was so evident that Vok could not avoid remarking it, and asked, surprised:

"What troubles thee, my dear one?"

Rugena gently released herself from his embrace. She was by now as white as her dress.

"I am not worthy of thy good opinion, or of thy love," she said, firmly. "I will have no more lies betwixt us! Perhaps thou wilt kill me when I have spoken, but yet my conscience will be at rest."

Vok listened, but could not believe his ears. At Rugena's last word a hoarse exclamation broke from him and his eyes blazed with that terrible anger which was so soon provoked in his passionate nature and which made all tremble who beheld it.

Rugena thought her last hour had come, but against all expectations the threatened storm did not break forth, and Vok with a mighty effort of his will controlled himself.

Passing a trembling hand across his forehead he said, thickly:

"Rugena, thou art raving! Or have I been blind? Couldst thou, whose glance doth reflect the purity of Heaven, commit a crime deserving of death? Yet, whatever thou hast to confess, speak on; for I must know all; and I will try to judge with leniency."

He fell back on the seat and covered his face with his hands. For a short time there was silence in the room, then, at last, Rugena began her confession in low and broken tones.

She spoke of the mortification, the offense to her pride and self-esteem her husband's infidelity had caused her, of the impression Jerome had produced upon her in her childhood, of how he had become her hero, and lastly, of the meeting on her wedding-day which had transformed the dream into reality.

With merciless fidelity she pictured her admiration of the orator of genius, an admiration which had grown in the measure of Vok's betrayals and neglect of her. She described her fury at meeting her husband with the girl on the saddle before him, and how Jerome's unexpected visit had led to a declaration of love and plans for flight which Hus had prevented by recalling them both to a sense of duty, and how after that Jerome had renounced his love for her and left, without even bidding her farewell.

During his wife's story the young Count's expressive face had been portraying the feelings of amazement, jealousy, wrath, and mortification he experienced. At the mention of Jerome's name he leapt up, and bending for-

ward listened with a painful intentness to every word spoken by his wife.

When Rugena had finished her story, and, overpowered by the weight of her guilt, sat with mournfully drooping head, a playful, joyous smile shone on Vok's face, and a deep sigh of relief escaped his breast. With a half-merry, half-angry glance at his wife's bowed head he sat down beside her, taking her hands, in which her face was hidden.

"So thou didst let that rascal kiss thee, and thyself did kiss him back?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, in a voice hardly audible.

"And canst thou swear that nought save kisses passed between you?"

Rugena's pale face was suffused by a bright flush.

"Vok! Of what dost thou think? I did not leave thy house! I am not some street-dancer, to give myself straightway to any man, even though I should love him."

"Why, then, I am ready to forget it all! And dost thou promise me to dream no more of flight?"

"I swear it! If only thou, thyself, drive me not forth from thy house as I have deserved," Rugena answered, bursting into tears.

"I were a fool to drive away from me so bewitching a woman, who cries her sins aloud before one asks her of them. Now, weep not, or thou wilt fall ill. I have told thee that I pardon thee thy kisses. Enough!"

He gave her milk to drink and tried to calm her, but

Rugena could not overcome her nerves, and her tears continued to fall.

"These women have in truth a flow of tears as abundant as a fountain," Vok said, shaking his head. "If thou didst let forth such a river in sight of Jerome no wonder that he melted like a piece of soap. But hark thee, Rugena; thou hadst gained nothing by betraying me. He is a mad-cap, and hath led more women-folk astray than I, since he hath combated in love's arena for more years than I. 'Tis true that he is cleverer than I, and hath had more success, since even little girls have loved him; but as concerns virtue. . . . Fu-u-uh! We will discuss that anon, and his story with thee shows that he grows old and foolish! Had I been in his place the Lord Himself had not persuaded me to renounce such happiness!"

Rugena gave a weak and shamefaced smile. Then Vok bent towards his wife and gazed searchingly into her eyes.

"Is all thy heart given up to thine ideal, or dost thou still retain one spark of affection which might serve us to kindle anew the flame of our love which is well-nigh extinct?" he asked with a sad smile.

Rugena threw her arms gratefully around her husband's neck and laid her beautiful head upon his breast.

"How can I help loving thee when thou hast shown me such magnanimity? I promise thee I will do everything to merit thy love."

"Now God be praised! And I on my part will prom-

ise to become so virtuous as never more to carry women with me on my horse. That I can swear!"

He embraced his wife, and lifting her like a feather in his arms kissed her passionately.

"Peace is signed and concluded!"

Next day Vok set out in search of Jerome. He understood now why the latter had become such a rare visitor. At Jerome's house the Count was told that he had been summoned to a hunt at one of the castles of Lord Wartenberg.

Seeing a sheet of unused parchment on the table, Vok seized a pen, sat down and began to draw. He depicted a narrow, winding path beset with thorns which led to Heaven, at the gate of which the Apostle Peter was sitting. Along the road galloped an ass, with tail uplifted, and the head of Jerome, while behind him a splendid bundle of hay could be seen.

"What wouldst thou here?" asked the Apostle. "Every day husbands with horns a-growing, deserted maidens and mistresses betrayed do make complaint against thee."

"I am reformed, and on one occasion I was even virtuous. But instead of wings ass's ears have for some reason grown upon me," answered Jerome on the long ribbon which proceeded from his mouth.

"Why, I will not trouble myself to unroll these heavy gates for thee, for sake of the *one occasion* of thy virtue. Return whence thou camest! None will recognize Je-

rome of Prague in ass's skin, and no husband will be on guard against thee."

Having finished the caricature Vok rolled up the parchment, addressed it, and, mightily pleased with himself, set out in quest of Hus. The latter, sad and alone, sat reading in his cell. The Count nearly stifled him in his embrace, and kissed him on both cheeks.

"Hast thou brought me good news, Count Vok, that thou art so cheerful?" asked Hus, with a smile.

"I have come, Father John, to thank thee for the service thou didst render me in preventing my wife's flight with Jerome—which would have forced me, to my great regret, to cut the throat of my friend."

"What? Dost thou know all?" said Hus, surprised.

"Yes. Rugena hath made full confession to me. I have forgiven her, and we have proclaimed a peace."

"Praise be to God! It was but my duty to hinder two insane creatures from committing a folly the consequences of which they would themselves have deplored."

At that moment Vok noticed upon the ground a traveling case and two saddle-bags.

"What means this, Master John? Are you preparing again to leave us?"

"Alas, my friend! I can no longer behold the suffering which the interdict doth inflict upon the people. And the King himself doth desire me to depart. To-morrow at dawn I set forth from Prague."

"But where are you going?" inquired Vok, deeply grieved.

"For the time being to castle Kosigrad, where the Lord Ousti hath kindly offered me shelter. Then God will decide and point me out my path," Hus answered mildly.

After some further conversation, and having extracted from Hus a promise to dine with them and take leave, Vok pressed his hand and left him.

XI

Two weeks had gone by since Hus's departure. Prague had resumed its accustomed aspect. The churches were open, and outwardly everything was tranquil. But beneath that tranquillity a storm was brewing.

Rugena was sitting, embroidering, by the window, awaiting her husband's return to dinner. She was absorbed in her work, and only exchanged a word from time to time with Anna, who was sitting opposite to her. Suddenly the sound of horses' hoofs distracted her attention. Glancing through the window, she beheld a gentleman in sumptuous Polish attire ride up to the house, followed by grooms who led two superb chargers, and several pack-horses by their bridles.

"Guests have arrived, and Vok is not home yet," said Rugena, with some displeasure.

Anna looked indifferently out of the window and suddenly trembled.

" 'Tis Svietomir!" she murmured, growing pale, and turning as if to fly from the room. But Rugena detained her.

"Surely thou wilt not fly from Svietomir?"

"I will see him later, but now I have no strength to meet him," whispered Anna, and tearing her dress away from Rugena's hold she ran out of the room.

Rugena followed her with a displeased glance, and, laying aside her work, went to inquire whether the guest were really her childhood's friend.

It appeared that it was indeed Svietomir who had arrived; but he had so changed since their last meeting that Rugena was obliged to gaze for long at him before she could recognize him. The thin, pale-faced youth had become a man, and was now a handsome stalwart figure, with a calm assured glance and warrior-like deportment.

"Thy gifts have brought me happiness and assured my future," he said, in a low voice, greeting Rugena. "And I have come to give the personal testimony of this."

Vok soon appeared and welcomed his former comrade with outstretched arms.

"Why, Svietomir, thou art grown magnificent!" he said, embracing him. "Who would recognize in thee the pitiful urchin whom that villain Ilarius so misused? First of all let us sup, and then thou shalt relate thine adventures. Hast thou come back to us for good?"

"No, my service is now in Cracow; but if you would shelter me for several weeks. . . ."

"Nay, what nonsense! Think not that we will let thee go for several months. They will make shift without thee well enough in Cracow," said Vok, good-humoredly, drawing him towards the dining-room.

At table Svietomir inquired about Anna, and whether she were not married.

"No. She is somewhat ailing to-day, but thou shalt see her later," Rugena said hurriedly.

When they were left alone the Count and Countess told him of the terrible tragedies which had happened in their house. Svietomir was deeply affected by the revelation of so much villainy.

"God have mercy on the unhappy soul of my aunt Jan! To what fearful sins did her immeasurable trust in these vile priests induce her!" he said, crossing himself. "I understand now that Anna doth hide herself from me through shame; yet, poor friend of my childhood, she is now doubly dear to me in her sorrow," he added, in a voice trembling with emotion.

The recital of all the terrible events that had taken place occupied so much time that Svietomir was only able to touch lightly upon his life in foreign parts. Remarking that he was exhausted, Vok hastened him off to bed.

On the following morning Svietomir distributed the presents he had brought them: for Rugena some silken material embroidered with silver, for Vok some skins of sable, and for Count Ginek a fine dagger with its handle set with amethysts.

"I have some brocade for Anna, and other things; but in her present state of mind such trifles will not please her," he said, regretfully. "I will rather present her the shrine of relics which I had purposed for my aunt, and will beg thee to accept the brocade, Rugena."

"Saints above! Thou must be rich to make such presents. Hast thou chanced upon some treasure?" asked Vok, laughing.

"Alack, no! But God hath not forsaken me, and hath

given me a position of honor and independence. Such small things are not worth speaking of. They are part of my booty from the battle of Tannenberg and the taking of Gildenberg."

"Thou didst take part at Tannenberg?" cried Vok, astonished. "Thou happy man! How I do envy thee! There would I fain have been to give those Germans a sound lesson!"

"Yes, thou didst miss a splendid opportunity! Oh, they learnt a lesson they will not soon forget. Some day I will tell thee all about it!"

The entrance of Count Ginek, who, had been away on business, interrupted the conversation and altered its course. He too gave the guest a hearty welcome, and made him promise to stay longer with them.

Svietomir related how, upon his arrival in Cracow, good fortune had led him to King Vladislav's secretary, who had interested a Cracow warrior, John Tarnovsky, in him; and how the latter had taken him into his service and sent him as a messenger to the Grand Duke Vitov, and later to Janusha Mazovetzky. The speed, punctuality, and skill with which he had fulfilled the mission entrusted to him gained him a place at Court, and after the battle of Grunenwald (or Tannenberg) the King had rewarded his services by making him a knight and giving him a fine estate, which, together with the booty fallen to his share, fully assured his future.

On the evening of that same day Svietomir at last saw Anna, and was struck by the change in her.

Deadly pale, and with obstinately lowered eyes, she muttered some words of greeting to him. But when he fervently kissed her hand and uttered some tender words she raised her eyes, convulsively returned the pressure of his hand, and burst into bitter tears.

XII

Time passed now peacefully in the Waldstein family. Svietomir renewed his acquaintance with former comrades and professors, but passed much of his time at home in conversation with Rugena or Vok, or his old friend Broda, who besieged him with questions about the war with the Germans and the Battle of Tannenberg, feasting upon the details of the rout of the Teuton Order.

Only Anna held aloof from him. Although she did not directly avoid him the friendly relations she had maintained with Rugena were not renewed with him. He more than once, in conversation with the young Countess, expressed his deep concern at the girl's condition.

"Yes, 'tis as though something had snapped in her since that fatal night. She hath become quite different and very strange. I had dreamed of another fate for Anna . . ." said Rugena, wiping her falling tears.

"I remember thou didst desire that I should marry her. I will confess that thy project pleased me, and I would now joyfully carry her with me to Cracow."

"What? Thou wouldst marry her even after . . . all that hath occurred? Oh, how good thou art, Svietomir! How noble-hearted! And how I love thee for it!" cried Rugena in a burst of joy.

Taking his head between her hands, she kissed him tenderly upon the forehead.

"The reward exceeds the service," he answered, laughing, and kissing her hand.

"Dost thou love her?"

"In truth I know not how to answer thee. Perhaps not! Yet she inspires me with sincere respect and fervent pity, and all that, united to our old attachment to one another, urges me to bear her hence, that in fresh surroundings and new circumstances she may forget her grief. And her sacrifice to save thee, my benefactress, renders the good and beauteous Anna doubly dear to me. I shall not find a better wife, and I hope that love will soon make our happiness. But I would ask thee, dear Rugena, to transmit my proposal to Anna; for she, poor thing, is so timid and affrighted that I dare not seek an opportunity to speak with her."

"Willingly will I do so! I will tell her of it to-day. And to-morrow with the grace of God we will celebrate your betrothal," Rugena answered joyfully.

All through the day Anna was suffering from an unbearable headache. She sat exhausted in an armchair reading her prayer-book. The broad folds of her black clothing and the darkness of her hair sharply defined the waxen pallor of her face and the hands which lay upon her knee. It was late, and Anna was surprised to see Rugena enter her room, the more so as the Countess's face seemed shining with unwonted happiness.

"Leave thy prayer-book, Anna! I have news for thee

which will brighten thy life and change thy destiny," said Rugena gladly, kissing her.

Anna smiled painfully in answer. When Rugena told her of Svietomir's proposal she trembled, and a burning flush suffused her face. But it was only for a moment; and then her head drooped sadly on her breast.

Surprised at her silence, Rugena took her hand.

"Art thou not glad, Anna? But wait until to-morrow, when our good Svietomir shall give thee the betrothal kiss. Then shalt thou be convinced that the past is dead to thee and that a bright new future hath opened before thee."

Anna raised her head, sat up, and passed her hand across her face.

"I am very grateful to Svietomir, and shall always remember his proposal, which doth me honor and raiseth me in mine own esteem, but . . . I cannot accept it."

Rugena was astonished.

"Why, thou art mad!" she cried indignantly. "A young, handsome, and wealthy man doth offer thee his name and love, and a brilliant and happy life; and thou dost repulse him! 'Tis foolish and ungrateful! I will not listen to such nonsense!"

"The advantages of Svietomir's proposal are apparent to me. But I refuse it because I could not make him happy. Something in my soul hath given way, and I am dead to all the joys of life. My dear and generous-hearted friend doth merit a better wife than I, broken as I am in soul and body."

"But Svietomir doth love thee. His devotion will make thee whole again. Thou dost not consider how thy refusal will grieve and offend him!"

"I know that in Svietomir's proposal lies as much pity as love for me. The heart of woman doth judge infallibly in these matters. Even though he should be offended now, the time will come when he will thank me for leaving him his freedom. And I myself desire not to be bound. That which remains of my heart after the catastrophe which hath wrecked my life belongs not to him. . . ."

Rugena started.

"Dost thou love another, Anna? But who, in God's name?"

"Who, if not him who sustained me in my suffering, who rescued me from the abandonment of despair, and saved me from self-destruction?"

"Thou lovest Master John? . . . Art thou not jesting, Anna?" said Rugena in amazement. "Remember, to cherish such feelings for a servant of the altar is a sin!"

Anna looked into her eyes, and a bright flush dyed her cheeks.

"Thou hast misunderstood me, Rugena! That which I feel for Master John doth in no way resemble sensual love. I love him! Oh, I love him—as the earth loves the fresh dew that doth slake her thirst, as the grass loves the sun which doth revive and warm it. I adore him with reverence as a healing spirit! To listen to his teach-

ing, to be led by him along the path to Heaven whose messenger he is, to see his mild glance turned approvingly upon me—that is all I value on this earth."

"I understand thee, Anna. Yet, however deep this feeling, I doubt if it can fill thy life. Thou art young, and the time will come when dreams will fade and reality assert its truth."

"Nay, I am already old in soul, and the feelings with which this saint inspires me—for he is a saint—can never fade! Why art thou astonished? Canst thou deny that he doth possess the gift of healing? Dost thou ask a proof? Did not his voice have a more calming influence upon mad Countess Jan than any of the doctors? And when I had those torturing headaches that seemed to rend my skull 'twas enough for him to lay his hand upon my brow to allay the suffering, and in that same instant I saw—hearest thou, Rugena?—I saw a golden brightness shining about his head as he prayed, and from his fingers streamed rays of light which imparted warmth to my whole body. I was wrapped in wondrous bliss, and my soul was turned to God till healing sleep did seal mine eyes."

Rugena listened to her in amazement. Anna's enthusiasm filled her with the conviction that Hus was indeed a higher being, and the passionate faith which resounded in the voice of her friend infected her as well.

"I see that thy decision is irrevocable, and will give Svietomir thine answer," she said, after a moment's silence.

"I should like best to speak to him myself. Tell him I beg that he will come to me to-morrow."

Next day a long conversation took place between Anna and Svietomir, and at length they exchanged assurances of friendship and mutual trust. But Svietomir was grieved and agitated when he left her. From that day the morbid constraint with which Anna had behaved towards him was replaced by a warm and sisterly affection.

XIII

A YEAR passed by, full of alarms and unrest. Great events in the life of the Middle Ages came to pass, and there were burning religious and political questions which demanded a speedy decision.

The plan, discussed during the past year, of summoning a General Council to put an end to the disorders in the Church was carried out. The Emperor Sigismund took the affair into his own hands, and conducted it energetically and successfully. At his famous meeting with Pope John XXIII in Lod it was settled that the Council should sit in the imperial town of Constance, and the Pope, restraining his wrath, was obliged to consent to this. The Divine nemesis thus laid its finger on the iniquitous Baldassare Cossa, and obliged him to appear at the Council, to his own extreme danger. There was no escape. On one side he was threatened by the Neapolitan King who hated him, and who was now the victorious master of Rome. On the other, his sole protector, the crafty Sigismund, was summoning him to Constance to put an end to dissension in the Church which could only damage the Pope by throwing a light upon his own life. In vain did he try to withdraw his head from the noose. His efforts were frustrated by Sigismund's inexorable will, and on the 30th of October an edict was proclaimed

by which the Emperor, with the Pope's agreement, summoned all Christian sovereigns, all princes of the Church, and all those whose names and learning were famed in Christendom to appear in Constance on the 1st of November, 1414, in order to consider the question of Church reform, and put an end to heresy.

This last point referred directly to Bohemia, for there dwelt the dauntless preacher whose inspired teaching and spotless purity was a living reproach to the depraved and vicious priesthood. This man was John Hus, in a certain way the incarnation of the protest of Christianity. All hatred was concentrated upon him, and he was to be made to pay for all the crimes of all those innovators who had dared to demand chastity and disinterestedness from the servants of the altar. So Hus, condemned beforehand by his enemies, was summoned by the council to appear and answer the accusation of heresy. With his habitual mildness and firmness he immediately responded to the summons, though in no way deceiving himself as to the danger to which he was exposed through his profession of the truths of the Gospel.

On a beautiful September evening several friends were gathered in a small, modestly furnished room in one of the houses in the Old Town. The windows looked out upon the garden, and a long dark corridor separated the room from the rest of the house, and preserved its occupant from any indiscretion on the part of neighbors. Its present occupant was Hus, who had come to Prague to

make ready for his long journey, and take leave of his friends before his departure for Constance.

The Prague priesthood pretended not to know of his presence in the town, and, for the time being, did not persecute him. So now we behold him in his humble dwelling, surrounded by friends who were conferring with him about his coming journey. Among these friends were John of Jesenice, Prokop of Pilsen, Peter of Mladenovic, Jacob of Stribo, Hus's substitute in the Bethlehem Chapel, Magister Gavlik, and Jerome of Prague, who had only just returned from his travels in Lithuania.

"Do not afflict yourselves, my friends, with thoughts of over-many dangers. The Emperor will present me a letter of safe conduct which will give me full freedom to prove and defend my integrity," Hus was saying at that moment.

"I doubt not Sigismund's good intentions to protect thee; but in Constance thou wilt fall in with Paleck and other of thine enemies who hate thee," said John of Jesenice.

"Yes, I do not deceive myself with dreams, and I know that heavy sufferings await me. But I trust in Christ's protection, and whatever the fate in store for me I shall bless God's will. I believe firmly in the victory of our cause, and am assured that if I perish truth will send to Prague instead of one feeble and impotent '*Goose*' (Hus)—many eagles and falcons. And the quickness of their eyes will surpass that of other feathered fowl.

Thus they may with God's grace fly high, leading the other birds to Christ Jesus, Who will strengthen and sustain all His faithful. . . ."

At that moment came a knock at the door, and Vok Waldstein entered. He was evidently pleased by something, and greeted his friends cheerfully.

"I have good news for thee, Master John," he said brightly. "The King hath appointed three nobles to accompany thee to Prague whose names will assure thee perfect safety: John of Chulm, Venceslas of Duba, and Henry Chulm of Lacembok."

"'Tis most gracious of the King and indeed I know not how to thank his Majesty," said Hus with feeling. "Never should I have conceived of such a powerful escort, or of all the protection that hath been afforded me."

"Who can know thee without loving thee? Since now thou wilt be stoutly safe-guarded, I hope that pestiferous Council will refute the accusations of Paleck and the rest of the Bohemian traitors. And besides that, thanks to Emirzlik, Bishop Nazaretsky hath borne testimony that thou art in no way guilty of heresy, and even Archbishop Conrad was obliged, through the Barons' insistency, to declare that he accounts thee a good Catholic. All that, added to the Emperor's letter, will render thee well-nigh unassailable."

The next few days were occupied with preparations for the journey, and as Hus was traveling to Constance at his own expense his friends vied with one another to free him from all material cares. Innumerable sums of

money and other gifts were showered upon him from all sides. A relative of Rugena's, Baron Bojek Rabstein, gave him, among other things, a splendid horse; Vok and his father a complete suit of black Flanders cloth; while Rugena herself pressed a considerable sum upon him.

Finally, on the 11th of October, Hus left Prague after taking a touching farewell of his friends, especially of Jerome, who accompanied him for several miles beyond the town.

"Beloved Master," he said, tenderly embracing Hus at parting, "stand firm in the coming struggle, and if any danger whatsoever should threaten thee I will fly to thy rescue."

It really seemed as though there were nothing to warrant the fears of Hus's friends or his own forebodings. The journey was successfully accomplished, and everywhere upon his road Hus met with respect and most friendly attention.

When his letter despatched from Nuremberg arrived, filled with the most curious and interesting details, a veritable holiday was held in the Waldsteins' house. With joyful astonishment Hus described how, instead of meeting him with hatred as he had expected, the German population had, on the contrary, turned out in crowds to meet him, and the most distinguished people, even among the priesthood, had conversed with him and extolled his teaching.

His journey was, in fact, a triumphal progress . . . to martyrdom. But his letter showed something else be-

ıes. The mere fact that he was so struck by his unex-
ɔcted popularity proved that in his pure and modest
ɜart he had never for an instant attached any special
gnificance to the greatness of his rôle.

PART III

PART III

I

". . . And this Bohemian land for which we fight
Loves not the master whom the chance of war—
Not its own choice or will—has given to it.
Men murmur at the oppression of their conscience,
And power hath only awed but not appeased them.
A glowing and avenging memory lives
Of cruel deeds committed on these plains;
How can the son forget that here his father
Was hunted by the blood-hound to the mass?
A people thus oppress'd must still be feared,
Whether they suffer or avenge their wrongs."

Wallenstein. Trans. S. T. COLERIDGE.

TOWARDS evening on the 3rd of November, 1414, along the road leading to Constance, people were crowding to meet the traveler whom every one was anxious to see, so great was the interest aroused by his personality, his teaching, and the courage with which he had revealed the evil-doings of the priesthood.

Night was falling when at length the sound of many horses' hoofs was heard, and all eyes were turned towards an imposing array of horsemen, who came trotting round a bend in the road. At their head, between two armed knights, rode a priest, dressed in black. Behind them

came an armed convoy, grooms, pages, and several pack-horses.

"Lood, look!" exclaimed a townsman, nudging his neighbor with his elbow, "he who rides between the knights must be John Hus."

"Who be the knights?" inquired the other.

"Wait, we'll ask old Sograd. He's from Prague, and he must know them."

Following in the wake of the horsemen they overtook a tall old man, talking to some compatriots who had arrived with the cortège. He willingly answered their questions and told them that the knights were Baron John of Chulm and Lord Henry of Lacembok, while those that rode behind were the Baron's secretary, Peter of Mladenovic, and John Kardinalis of Rheinstein, Prior of the Church of Yanovitch, on the Baron's estates.

The crowd grew greater as the travelers made their way along the streets of the town. At last they stopped in St. Paul Street, in front of the house in which Hus was to take up his abode. His hostess, the Widow Fida, who was standing on the doorstep, joyfully greeted the esteemed guest.

"So, Master John, we have reached the harbor! God grant we bring you back as happily to Prague, where you will have a welcome even more rousing," said John of Chulm, with a cheerful smile, before he departed to his own quarters.

Next day, refreshed by sleep, and having read mass in one of the rooms of the house, Hus set about to arrange

his things. When that was accomplished, he sat down by the window and looked at the animated crowds moving backwards and forwards in the street. At that moment his two protectors rode up to the house, and Hus, not without some apprehensiveness, went to meet them.

But their cheerful faces immediately set his fears at rest, and he began to feel more hopeful.

"We bring good news, dear Master," said Baron John, pressing his hand. "We have come to tell you the details of our audience with the Pope. We told him of your arrival, and begged him not to withhold his protection from you. His Holiness received us graciously, and to our petition made answer: 'If Hus had killed mine own brother, yet would I use all means at my disposal to preserve him from violence in Constance.' And when he learned that the Emperor had granted you a letter of safe-conduct and taken you under his protection, he promised to remove the interdict which weighs upon you. That will enable you to move freely in the town and visit the churches."

"Though I would counsel you, Master John, to be careful for the while, to avoid collisions or anything that might serve as a pretext for blame. Most of all not to appear at great religious solemnities," said Henry of Lacembok.

"I will follow your counsel, noble Lord, and refrain from appearing among the people," said Hus, submissively.

And indeed he shut himself up within the house, never

leaving it, even when Venceslas of Duba brought him a safe-conduct, and the Pope and Cardinals officially declared that the interdict was for the time suspended.

He led a secluded life, working at sermons and speeches he hoped to be allowed at some time to deliver, and deliberating different theological questions with his numerous visitors.

But while he, absorbed in work, never departed from his voluntary isolation, his enemies were not idle, and displayed extraordinary activity, letting slip no opportunity of inciting the members of the Council and public opinion against him.

Particular venom was displayed by Venceslas Tiem, the seller of indulgences in Prague, Paleck, and Michael de Causis. The first had never forgiven Hus for having spoilt his trade, the second his banishment from Prague, while the third hated him for his revelations of the venality of the priesthood, of which he, himself, had presented a striking instance. They felt instinctively that the time had come for their revenge, and hurried indefatigably about the town, showing the Cardinals distorted passages from the works of Hus, pasting up notices in which he was denounced as a heretic, excommunicated from the Church, and went as far as to spread rumors in the town that he had endeavored to escape, hidden in a bundle of straw. In consequence of these intrigues, it was decided to arrest the dangerous preacher.

On the morning of the 28th of November, the good Fida was standing on her doorstep discussing the dear-

ness of foodstuffs with a neighbor returning from the market. Suddenly her attention was attracted by two companies of the Town Guard which appeared at either end of the street and silently took possession of the neighboring house.

"What doth this mean?" asked Fida, in alarm. "Can they be plotting some mischief against the good Master?"

"'Twere best to go and warn him," said the neighbor.

"I like not to disturb him. The noble knight of Chulm is with him now," said Fida.

But at that moment four horsemen, followed by grooms, drew up in front of the house, and one of them demanded authoritatively whether Hus were at home.

"Yes, Master Burgomaster," answered Fida, with a deep curtsey.

The riders alighted and went into the house. The women inquired of the grooms who were the gentlemen who accompanied the burgomaster.

"The Bishops of Augsberg and Trent, and the knight, Hans von Poden," they answered.

Hus and Chulm were calmly conversing when the newcomers opened the door and advanced into the room. One of the Bishops announced that they had been sent by the Pope to invite Master John to appear before them and explain his teaching, as he had repeatedly asked to do.

Chulm's proud face flushed at these words. Being a

man of experience and foresight, he at once suspected the true object of this visit, and could scarcely restrain his wrath.

"What means this course of action, my Masters? You have forgot that Master John is under special protection of the Emperor, who hath strictly forbidden the trial to begin before his arrival. I am authorized to preserve the inviolability of Master Hus, and in the Emperor's name I protest against these hasty measures. I warn you, gentlemen, that the honor of the Empire is at stake!"

"Calm yourself, my Lord," said the Bishop of Trent, in a conciliatory voice. "You are mistaken. We have come with good intent."

Here Hus interposed, and said that though he had by no means come to Constance for the Pope and Cardinals alone to judge his teachings, but in order to defend himself publicly before the Council; yet, if it were demanded of him, he would not refuse to appear before His Holiness.

"'Tis a wise decision, which of course will operate in your favor, Master Hus," said the burgomaster. "Take your cloak and follow us without fear."

"I will accompany Master Hus and not leave him, for I feel it to be my duty," said John of Chulm.

"You are free to do as it may please you, my Lord," answered the Pope's messengers.

When Hus, having changed his clothing, was preparing to leave the house with the knights, the Widow Fida,

who was awaiting them in the passage, approached and asked his blessing.

"Something is being plotted against you. The neighboring house is full of soldiers," she whispered, bursting into tears.

Hus turned pale, but controlled himself. He blessed her, went out, and mounted his horse; and the cavalcade started in the direction of the papal residence.

The Cardinals were gathered in a room of the palace. When Hus and Chulm entered, the President of the assembly called upon Hus to defend himself against the accusation of having preached grave errors, and sown the seed of pernicious heresy in Bohemia.

"Know, most reverend fathers, that I had rather die than spread errors of any sort in opposition to the teaching of the Gospel. Of my own will I came to Constance to submit to punishment for any false teaching of which I might be convicted," Hus answered, in an agitated voice.

"A wise response! In that case we will withdraw to confer upon which questions to put to thee," answered the Cardinals, and left the room.

They had scarcely done so when an armed guard took possession of all the entrances, which aroused Chulm's displeasure, and helped to confirm his suspicions. His excitement grew still greater when the Cardinals reappeared and by a succession of cunningly thought-out questions strove to catch Hus tripping through some ill-considered word, which he, however, carefully avoided.

"These vipers seek to catch you unawares in order the more freely to accuse you of heresy," said the knight, scornfully.

"In the truth of the holy teachings lies my strength, wherefore I need fear nothing," Hus answered firmly.

Several hours passed, and it was nearly three o'clock when Paleck suddenly entered. His gaunt face expressed proud self-satisfaction.

"At length thou hast fallen into our hands, thou shameless heretic!" he said disdainfully to his former friend. "Think not to escape till thou hast paid the last farthing."

Hus made no answer, and turned away from him. Then Chulm, flushed with anger, began sternly to rebuke Paleck for his betrayal of his fatherland. The dispute waxed keener when Michael de Causis appeared, no less pleased with himself than Paleck, and in spiteful words, mingled with abuse, began to reproach Hus for having ruined the University of Prague, and caused the withdrawal of the German professors and students, for which his hour of punishment had come.

Seeing that Hus preserved an unmoved silence, and that the knight made no endeavor to conceal his scorn for both of them, the worthy couple thought it better to withdraw.

Night fell. At length the Pope's chamberlain came in and announced to the knight that he was free to leave, but that Master Hus, by order of the Cardinals, was to remain in custody.

Though all the events of the day had pointed to this *dénouement,* the noble knight of Chulm was seized with a burst of uncontrollable fury.

"'Tis a vile trap!" he shouted. "I will complain to the Emperor of this outrage upon a man to whom he has afforded his protection! 'Tis shameless to act thus against a godly man, a saint, under cover of lies and treachery! The Pope will not dare to do so. I will forthwith demand from him the fulfilment of his given word—not to lay hands on Hus," he cried, beside himself, striding from the room.

Meantime a convoy of soldiers led Hus to the house of the Canon of the Constance Cathedral, where he was kept for a week under strict surveillance, after which the Archbishop of Riga, John von Waldenrod, ordered him to be taken to the Dominican monastery on the banks of the Rhine.

It was the 6th of December, and a heavy frost; and the prisoner shivered with cold in his place of detention—a damp, dark, underground cell. The only sound to break the stillness was the splash of the waves against the monastery walls; and the stench from a sewer close at hand poisoned the air. The only human to approach him was the monk who brought his meager food.

The soul of Hus, tender even to weakness in the presence of others' suffering, seemed during this period of his own anguish, to be made of steel. Meek, yet steadfast in his faith, he submitted without a murmur to the terrible conditions of his imprisonment. Yet, though

the spirit was strong, the flesh proved to be weak, and Hus fell dangerously ill. . . .

At that time events of extreme importance were taking place in Prague. Yakubek, and several other priests following his footsteps, began openly to preach the necessity of returning to the original apostolic institutions, and of communicating under both forms. After preaching, the next thing was to apply the practice, and Yakubek was the first to administer the chalice to the faithful.

Dissensions occurred among the population: the greater part sided with the "Calixtines," the upholders of the chalice, but the higher priesthood, and especially the German burgherhood, adhered to the Roman rites.

Amid the disagreements and disturbances accompanying the reform of the greatest of the Christian sacraments, the news of Hus's imprisonment fell like a thunderbolt. Bohemia was convulsed with wrath. A meeting of nobles was held to protest against its illegality, and Count Ginek actually decided to go personally to Constance to confer upon the spot with the Bohemian barons as to the necessary measures for the liberation of the beloved preacher.

On learning his intentions, Rugena begged the Count to take her with him. Besides the deep and lively interest she felt in the fate of her friend and confessor, the young Countess was eager to behold the brilliancy of the Imperial and Papal Courts, to which spiritual princes, worldly aristocrats, and famous scholars were hastening from all parts of the world. But it was with difficulty that she obtained the consent of both the Counts. In

view of the crowded state of Constance and the probable difficulty of finding accommodation, Count Ginek at last promised to take her on condition that a relative of his who owned a house in Constance would afford them hospitality.

But it seems that *"ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut."* The messenger despatched to Constance brought the news that the house in question was at their disposal, and that they were eagerly awaited. This removed the last obstacle and Rugena began to prepare for her journey. Anna, Tullia, and Itka were to accompany her, but Vok, to his huge displeasure, could not get leave just then from the King, and was obliged to remain in Prague. But it was decided that he should join them at the earliest opportunity.

Whoever now visits the fair city of Constance can have no conception of what took place within its walls during the famous Council of 1414.

It seemed as if the whole of Christendom had gathered there. There were thirty cardinals, twenty archbishops, one hundred and fifty bishops, prelates, and doctors, more than eighteen hundred ordinary priests; kurfursts, Austrian and Bavarian dukes, and an innumerable crowd of princes, counts, barons, and courtiers of ever nationality.

Those of the higher ranks brought with them lengthy suites (a contemporary chronicle bears witness to 30,000 horses), and altogether, counting foreign sightseers, merchants and strolling players, the crowd amounted to at

least 100,000 persons. The little town was filled to overflowing, and those who came late were obliged to camp in tents in the surrounding districts.

The town itself seemed transformed into one vast fair given up entirely to noisy merry-making, and the weightiness of the questions to be decided did not hinder the worthy fathers of the Council from patronizing the festivals, tourneys, and banquets. A great deal was talked about reform in the Church, but the lusty cardinals, bishops and prelates had not the slightest notion of reforming their own loose style of living. With the utmost brazenness they carried their mistresses with them, and disported themselves more boldly with the 15,000 wanton women, who had hastened to Constance, than did the young men of the secular world.

The shamelessness displayed was such that Hus wrote to his friends: "If you could but cast eyes on this assembly, calling itself sacred and most impeccable, you would behold great demoralization. The inhabitants say that thirty years will be needful to purify the town from the abominations which have defiled it."

II

On Monday, the 26th of March, Count Waldstein, with his daughter-in-law and their suite, arrived in Constance. Although it was the beginning of Passion Week, the streets were crowded, and the air seemed full of confused noise and bustle. Rugena's eyes, as she rode on horseback beside the Count, roved hither and thither in eager curiosity, so new was everything to her, so varied, so teeming with life and movement. They were obliged to traverse the whole town to reach their relative's house, and at nearly every step their progress was hindered: now in order to pass through a crowd gathered round a strolling pedler, a street singer, or some attraction of the sort; then again to draw up in line and stand aside to give passage to the pompous suite of some prelate, magnificently clad, mounted on a richly caparisoned horse, and gazing indifferently at the crowds surrounding him. Groups of warriors of the most various types strolled hither and thither: swarthy Italians with fiery eyes; huge, haughty Englishmen; slim, well-made Frenchmen, carrying the elegant fashions of the day to the extreme; thick-set Slavs, with their childishly naïve glances—all forming a kaleidoscope which made the eyes dim and the head giddy. Once they were even obliged to make a

détour in order to avoid a street brawl, the unruly servants of one of the Polish ambassadors having fallen out with the suite of some Teuton knight.

At length they reached the house of Bridget von Laufenstein, the widow of a German noble. This lady received her Bohemian relations with enthusiasm and conducted them to a set of large and comfortable apartments, a veritable godsend in such a state of overcrowdedness. Rugena at once conquered the heart of the good old lady, who promised that she should see everything of interest in the town, beginning with the Emperor and Empress, whom, thanks to her connections with the Court, she was enabled to approach.

"Had you come a little sooner you should have seen the Pope as well; but only imagine! he slipped away last week, leaving the whole town in a state of consternation," said Bridget, excitedly. "When the news of his flight spread next morning, all lost their heads: dealers shut up their shops and pedlers hid themselves for fear of being pillaged. And, in truth, the people broke into many of the apartments abandoned by prelates who had followed the Pope, and plundered them. The Burgomaster even summoned the citizens to arms. It was as though the judgment day had come!"

"And is it known whither the Pope hath fled?" inquired the Count.

"'Tis supposed he is in Schaffhausen. Dear Lord! Who could have thought it would have come to that, when His Holiness entered the city so triumphantly with the

Cardinals and Bishops all about him, and with such a splendid suite!" said the old lady, sorrowfully..

"Methinks the Emperor's entry was no less brilliant," observed Rugena.

Leaving the ladies in conversation, the Count went out to visit John of Chulm.

The knight John, that courageous and indefatigable defender of Hus, was sitting alone, composing a letter to the Moravian nobles, protesting against the imprisonment of Hus in spite of his safe-conduct. The Baron was overjoyed at sight of his old friend. He immediately threw down his pen, embraced the Count, and ordered wine to be brought in. The conversation at once turned upon the subjects which were occupying all minds: the Pope's flight and the imprisonment of Hus. For them, as Bohemians, ardent partisans of Hus and of Church reform, the last of the two questions was the most important, and John of Chulm, with natural indignation, described the details of their friend's imprisonment.

"Thou canst conceive, Lord Ginek, that I was beside myself; and I told them, not mincing my words, what I thought of their premeditated snare. Then I betook me to the Pope, to persuade him to keep his given word to protect Master Hus. 'What wouldst thou of me?' said he, shrugging his shoulders. 'They that accuse him are thine own compatriots!' Then, turning his eyes upon the Cardinals and Bishops, he added low, 'Dost thou not see that I am in their hands?' "

"At any rate, 'tis as though he acknowledge that base

calculation which urged him to deliver up the innocent victim as a sacrifice to the priesthood. He thought his betrayal of Hus would array the priests upon his side," said Waldstein, scornfully.

"But this time his villainy hath brought him no advantage; while for Master Hus the results are lamentable. He hath fallen defenseless into the hands of his worst enemies, and they act towards him in a revolting manner! They have cast him into the prison of the Dominican monastery, a stinking den, close by the monastery sewer, which may in truth be called a grave. The walls are sodden with damp, and Master John fell dangerously ill. Even then those barbarians tormented him with questions, hoping that while dying he might in some manner incriminate himself!"

"Well, and Sigismund? What says he concerning this insolent violation of his safe-conduct?"

"At first he seemed dismayed, and turned a courteous ear to our protest. But since he hath been here he hath, it seems, changed his opinion, and doth make no step to free the hapless one who confided in his imperial word. . . . God alone knoweth what will chance with the Council and the schism now that the Pope hath fled."

"Cossa must have a powerful accomplice, else had he not dared to act in that manner."

"'Tis certain! The public finger points to the Austrian duke, whose protection he purchased. Duke Frederick, to aid the Pope's escape, organized a brilliant tourney, and while the town was lost in admiration of that

spectacle, Cossa fled, disguised, and repaired to Schaffhausen, which belongs to the Duke. Now that he is free and master of the situation, he will make work for Sigismund."

For long the friends conversed, and although both were so keenly interested in political and Church questions, they turned at length to family matters, and Waldstein remarked among other things that he had brought his daughter-in-law with him to Constance.

"By the way, dost thou know that Svietomir Kryshanov, thy former protégé, is here?" the Baron asked.

"Is't possible? How comes he here?"

"'Tis true! I have myself spoke with him many times. He is in the suite of Lord Zavisha, the Ambassador of King Vladislav. If thou dost wish it I will send one of my people to inform him of thy coming."

"I should be much beholden to you! Rugena will be overjoyed to see her friend."

The next day, just as the Countess had finished dressing to set forth with Tullia under Broda's escort, Svietomir appeared among them with a radiant face.

Rugena, who imagined him to be in Cracow, was delighted to see him, and at once put off her expedition.

They talked of their journeys, and of the Council. Rugena was enchanted by the animation of the town, and described the impression produced upon her by the mingling nationalities and by attires of the foreigners assembled in Constance. Svietomir assented, delighted with her eagerness.

"There is assuredly much here to marvel at," he said; "and if thou wilt permit me to escort thee I will show thee everything, beginning with the Imperial entry into the Cathedral for holy service."

"I will accept thy services most gratefully, the more so since the protection of a knight in such chaos as doth prevail is very welcome. For, though never so careful, one may fall into some trouble!" And she related how, only the day before, they had been obliged to go out of their way to avoid a street fight, when the Poles had fallen foul of the Teutons.

"I have heard of that. A Pole and two Germans were wounded. . . ."

"But what a watch must be kept here for them to inform you of every such collision!" said Rugena, laughing.

"Not such a good one as you think. But some people of the castellan of Kalisch, Lord Ganusha Tulitzky, took part in yesterday's tussle, and I heard him tell Lord Zavisha about it in the evening. But such things are trifles. We have more notable affrays than that," laughed Svietomir. "At one of the banquets the Archbishops of Pisa and Mainz had a difference of opinion. The dispute waxed keen, and they began to swear at one another, and soon came to fisticuffs. But as the reverend pastors of the Church were unarmed, they clutched at one another by the hair and rolled under the table, striving to strangle one another. Many of the priests who were present took fright and leapt through the window!"

"In truth an edifying spectacle!" said Rugena, laughing heartily.

Then they began talking of what they would like to visit, mentioning among other things the sacristy of the Cathedral, where many treasures from the districts surrounding Constance were preserved; and the church of the old Benedictine abbots, with the tomb of the Emperor Charles the Fat. Anna, who was present during the conversation, remarked with a smile that she would like to take part in the inspection of the monasteries and holy places; but flatly refused to look on at the antics of strolling acrobats, tight-rope dancers, and people of that description.

"Poor Anna hath not yet regained repose of spirit. Her heart is as heavy as ever," said Svietomir, sorrowfully, when Anna had left the room.

"Alas! Her malady, it seems, cannot be cured," sighed Rugena. "Sometimes she grows so strange that I am afraid."

"In what way is she strange?"

"Why, for example, she will sit for hours together looking fixedly somewhere into the distance, seeing and hearing nothing of what is going on around her. Then suddenly she will begin to say things that none may understand, like incantations of some kind. Once, before we had heard of Master John's imprisonment, she said to me suddenly with a fearful aspect, 'Hast thou received no news from John Hus?' 'No,' I said, 'but judging from his last letter, we may hope that all is well with

him.' 'But I have seen him,' she said, 'in a dark, damp, evil-smelling cell, it seems to me—a prison.' I thought she had dreamt it, for since her fanatical passion for Master Hus she thinks but of him. But yesterday Uncle Ginek told us that Master John is indeed interned in a foul hole, where he lies ill. Then my heart was full of fear for Anna!"

"In God's name, Rugena, bid her hold her peace about such things, or she will be taken for a witch!" Svietomir said, crossing himself. After being silent a moment, he added, "'Tis well that you arrived not sooner, for Anna would have lost her reason altogether had she met Brancaccio."

"Almighty God! Brancaccio here?" exclaimed the Countess, turning pale.

"He was here, in attendance upon the Pope. But he left Constance three days after Cossa's flight, and probably is now with him in Schaffhausen."

"Praise God the monster is not here!" said Rugena, with a sigh of relief.

"Ah, how my hands itch every time I see him! I would give one of mine eyes for the bliss of plunging my dagger into his throat!" exclaimed Svietomir, clenching his fists.

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Count Ginek, who was evidently perturbed by something.

"Imagine what I have learnt! Hús is not in Constance," he said, sinking into an armchair.

"Is he free? Hath he escaped?" cried Rugena and Svietomir in one voice.

"Free? Will those blood-suckers relinquish the prey they have hunted so long?" the Count answered, wrathfully. "No, this is what hath happened. After the Pope's flight, the fate of Hus lay in Sigismund's hands, and Chulm and all other friends of Hus hoped to profit by this to secure his deliverance. Now, suddenly, this perfidious Sigismund hath placed Master Hus under the authority of the Archbishop of Kosnitsky, a personal enemy of Hus, who assuredly will not pardon him the accusation at one time cast into his face. And to-night Otto von Hochberg hath removed him to his castle at Gottlieben under convoy of one hundred and seventy soldiers, which will serve to show you how they all fear the poor humble priest, armed with his virtue and God's word alone."

"My God! Now 'tis impossible either to see him or render him help," said Svietomir in a sad voice.

"But didst thou visit Master Hus and see him in his prison?" asked Rugena.

"In truth I did. And not I alone, but many other friends contrived to see him, thanks to the aid of the gaolers, who are all much attached to their mild and patient captive. Especially one of them, Robert. He and his wife are both good people, and have done all for him that lies in their power."

"He must needs be removed just as we came hither!" said Rugena, and burst into tears.

III

It was April. One day, as it was growing dusk, the Countess was sitting at home by herself. The Count had gone to visit Lord Ganusk Tulikovsky, with whom Svietomir had made him acquainted; Tullia had gone to a friend of hers from Bologna, the wife of an Italian doctor, whom she had known since childhood, and had met accidentally in Constance; and Anna was praying in her room. Profiting by her solitude, Rugena was writing a letter to Vok, minutely describing her impressions of all she had seen and heard in this ant-hill. She was disturbed by the hurried entrance of Yaronwi, who came to say that Broda begged her to go to the Count's room whither he had conducted a stranger who had arrived on important and urgent business. The Countess, astonished, immediately rose and followed the page. Broda met her at the door of her father-in-law's room, and said in a whisper:

"Master Jerome hath arrived hither disguised, to see Baron John; but not finding him at his house hath come on here. Detain him, my lady, until the Count returns, and persuade him if possible to quit the town: for otherwise he is lost. I will keep watch that none shall enter."

And without waiting for an answer he went away, and Rugena hastily opened the door of the Count's room.

The daring guest was standing at the open window, looking with a morose, abstracted air at the fresh young grass in the garden. He had thrown his hat and cloak on to a chair, and the setting sun was bathing in its tender light his handsome manly face, and his finely-shaped white hands, which played nervously with the handle of the Italian dagger hanging from his belt.

Jerome had scarcely changed at all. The same gay self-assurance lighted up his big, dark eyes, as, turning at the sound of the opening door, he saw Rugena standing confusedly on the threshold.

Her heart was beating violently. This was her first meeting alone with him since that memorable interview when they had revealed their hearts to one another, and they both stood silent, overcome by the rush of remembrances of those intoxicating, though oppressive, moments.

Jerome was the first to recover himself.

"Forgive me for disturbing you. I had hoped to find Count Waldstein and Lord John here."

"You are always a welcome guest to us, Master Jerome, as you well know. Nevertheless I must scold you for your lack of caution," she said, with a friendly smile, stretching out to him her hand, which he kissed.

"I have demanded a safe-conduct from the Council, but have received no reply. The uncertainty and the agony of inactivity in that refuge to which I fled have grown so intolerable, that I resolved to seek news in Constance."

"But you risk your life," said Rugena, in frightened tones.

A bitter smile appeared upon his lips.

"My life? In truth, it must come to an end some day," answered Jerome; and there was a note of deep sorrow in his voice.

"Yes, to an end ordained by God; but not hastened by recklessness."

So saying, she sat down by the window.

Jerome answered nothing. His head drooped, and he grew thoughtful. His roving life passed like a panorama before his eyes, full of adventure, danger, struggles, and successes; but devoid of peace and happiness. The seductive image of hearth and home at which he might rest, body and soul, and find pure bliss, was here beside him, yet removed from him by insurmountable barriers.

Capricious fate, as though in mockery, had revealed these treasures to him, had even permitted him to behold them, and then had snatched them away again, saying to him:

"Away! Resume thy lonely path with its unknown aims!"

At that moment Jerome felt that he was tired of living, and his soul was filled with bitter grief.

Suddenly recollecting that his long silence might offend the Countess, he summoned up the knightly gallantry inherent in him to banish the involuntary sense of awkward constraint. But just at that moment his eyes en-

countered those of Rugena. Love and commiseration were shining in her timid glance.

Jerome at once understood that he was not quite forgotten, and that, although perhaps unconsciously, that pure soul still preserved within its depths a corner in which he reigned and in which there was still a store of tenderness for him. His pale face was flushed with a slight tinge of color, and seizing Rugena's hand he asked in a low voice:

"You do not wish me to die?"

Rugena's hand trembled in his.

"No, I do not wish it! I wish you to live for Bohemia, for the sacred cause, and for . . . your friends who love you," she said, overcoming her emotion, and there was a note of tenderness in her hasty whisper.

Jerome's eyes shone with a calm and tranquil gladness.

"Your wish is law to me. I will depart to-day, and return to our fatherland."

"Oh, I thank you," she cried joyfully.

She could say no more. She was trembling with agitation, and tears choked her voice.

The sound of hasty footsteps was heard in the next room, the door was flung noisily open, and the Count entered with John of Chulm. They were both in a great state of alarm, and could not resist reproaching Jerome for his foolhardiness as they embraced him.

He repeated to them what he had told Rugena about his impatience in awaiting the letter of safe-conduct.

"And a passing fine one it will be," remarked Baron

John, indignantly. "Peter of Mladenovic hath procured a copy which this morning he did bring me, and here is what it says among other things." He drew a sheet of parchment from his pocket and read aloud: "'Nothing is more desired of our hearts than to ensnare the foxes who ravage the orchards of the Lord, and we hereby call upon thee to appear,' and so forth. I hope 'tis clear enough expressed! But the end is still better! Hearken to this: 'We give thee this letter to safeguard thee so far as it be in our power, and consistent with justice, and not opposed to faith. And besides, we would have thee know that we shall try thee, whether thou dost appear at the appointed time or not.' Thou canst imagine what a safe-conduct of the like sort doth augur for thee if even that which Master Hus received from the Emperor could not protect him. With thee they will stand on still less ceremony."

"Yes, Master Jerome, prithee depart; and that as soon as possible! We shall not rest until we know that thou art safe at home," said the Count.

"You have convinced me! I will hasten hence at once, and will send you news so soon as I have crossed the borders of Bohemia," answered Jerome, with a glance at Rugena.

Night fell. Two monks, their faces hidden in their cowls, entered the dark alley by the house in which Brancaccio lived. Through a small gate hidden in the wall they entered the garden, and from thence the house.

One of them lit the candles in the candelabra in the room we have described above, and the other, casting upon the table the gray beard which had been attached to his chin, threw off his cassock. It was Brancaccio with his secretary.

Ilarius's fat, greasy face was shining with fiendish delight, and handing Brancaccio his silken house-attire he said, maliciously:

"We have made no mistake, your Eminence! The disdainful Jerome hath indeed dared to appear in these parts."

"What said the girl we awaited at the cross-roads?"

"Only that which we knew before: that Jerome was come hither. But she said besides that the Countess had told Anna that the heathen had fled straight to Bohemia. 'Twill be indeed vexatious if he escape just vengeance."

"Verily! If only for having tossed thee through the window, he hath deserved the stake," laughed Brancaccio, in the scornful tone which he always used towards Ilarius. Though he had succeeded the bold and resourceful Bonaventura, Ilarius in no way replaced him. "But can we not detain him in some way, denounce him? In a word, hinder his flight?" he added.

"The Devil only knoweth which road he will take; and then of course he will travel at full speed. Yet if I had money it might be possible to send a messenger to the Abbot of Hirschof. He is like to pass through there since 'tis near the borders of Bohemia," sail Ilarius, significantly.

"Send thou thy messenger. I'll pay the cost! Thou hast deserved that gratification by thy faithful services," said Brancaccio, with a wicked smile, as he dismissed his secretary.

Left alone the Cardinal fell into gloomy thoughtfulness. At moments his face was distorted by an almost diabolical anger, and he had many reasons to be angry. Baldassare Cossa's affairs were going from bad to worse. His protector, Frederick of Austria, frightened at the results of his own act, had made submission to the Emperor; and the fugitive Pope, abandoned by his adherents, was roving meanwhile from town to town.

The fall of his uncle and benefactor occupied Brancaccio's thoughts almost as much as his plan for taking revenge upon the Waldsteins.

Ilarius had punctually carried out his instructions, and had entered into relations with one of the Waldsteins' servants, who kept them informed of all that occurred in the house. Brancaccio himself haunted the neighborhood disguised as a monk, and had seen Rugena, Anna, and Tullia.

Rugena's beauty had reawakened the Cardinal's brutal appetites. But now these feelings were mingled with hatred, and he thirsted, not so much to possess Rugena as to ruin her. Since she was not destined for him he resolved that she should be destined for the tomb alone. With this aim he concocted a poison, the secret of which had been imparted to him by his uncle, which did not kill at once, but wasted the organism by degrees. It

only remained to find the fitting occasion for administering the poison to his victim.

He was boiling with wrath against Tullia also, whose betrayal of him had worked his ruin, upon the very threshold of success. The traitress was to be repaid with hellish torments; but he wished to seize her alive, in order to be able to gloat over her agony.

As to Anna, she seemed to him to have grown immeasurably ugly and stupid in her black garments, with her pale face, and wild, uncanny glance. In Brancaccio's perverted soul there was not the slightest trace of pity for her, or for the young life he had ruined. He was only sorry that he had wasted time upon her on that fateful night, and had not killed her on the spot.

Feasting in anticipation upon the suffering and tears he would occasion all who had dared to stand in his way, he forgot his own political failures and even the sharp pain in his back, which in every abrupt movement reminded him that he too was mortal.

Rugena was impatiently awaiting the news of Jerome's safe arrival in Bohemia. Suddenly a rumor spread through the town that Jerome had been recognized at Hirschof by a local priest, denounced by him to the authorities, arrested on April 24th by officers of John of Bavaria, Prince of the Palatinate, and imprisoned in Zulzbach to await the further orders of the Council.

The Bohemians and Moravians then in Constance were deeply affected by these tidings. Fortunately Rugena heard of them through Anna, who communicated the sad

news to her as they sat alone together, so that her devoted friend was the only witness of her tears and her despair. The fearful danger which threatened Jerome awakened the love for him which was still slumbering in the Countess's heart, and which she sincerely imagined to be friendship; while the terrible fate in store for the brilliant and fascinating man, the pride of all Bohemia, was in her eyes a sufficient reason for the warmest sympathy towards him. Perhaps Vok, noting his wife's pallor, her nervousness and obvious state of suffering, guessed at her real feelings; but Count Ginek at that time paid little attention to his daughter-in-law.

Like most of his friends assembled in Constance, Waldstein was completely absorbed in contemplating the struggle between the Pope and the Emperor; and the implacable severity with which the Roman Pontiff had been condemned excited the whole of Christendom.

Completely broken down, and ready to do anything to obtain pardon for himself, Frederick of Austria arrived in Constance; and, falling at the feet of Sigismund at one of the banquets, begged his forgiveness and ceded to him all his possessions in Alsace and the Tyrol. The Emperor returned his lands to him in exchange for his oath of vassalage, and from that moment not a single protector was left to Baldassare Cossa.

IV

It was a beautiful day towards the end of May. Svietomir, who had come upon a visit to the Waldsteins, related to them how he had been the day before to consult a fortune-teller, who had not only told his past with surprising accuracy, but had predicted a brilliant future for him. He tried to persuade the ladies to pay a visit to this woman, under his escort.

Rugena's sadness and apathy disquieted Svietomir, and he proposed this expedition with the object of diverting her. Two days before, the Countess had been ill, complaining of giddiness and a pain in her chest, and she had vomited, and fallen into a prolonged swoon after drinking a cup of milk. At Tullia's advice she sent for her friend's husband, a young Italian doctor who was in attendance upon the person of Cardinal Ursino.

After a careful examination of his patient the doctor, Cosimo Bonelli, felt alarmed. The medicine which he prescribed caused the Countess to vomit again, after which she fell asleep.

On the following day Rugena was completely restored again, and even assented with some pleasure to Svietomir's proposal.

The longing to lift the veil which hides the future is inborn in every man.

Rugena was influenced by it, and Tullia, with her Italian superstition, was particularly so.

The peaceful, happy circumstances of her new life had reawakened in her the gaiety of youth and joy of life which had been for so long apparently extinguished; and Svietomir's proposition inspired her with the wish to learn what Fate had still in store. Rugena hoped to ascertain how the trials of Hus and Jerome would end, and, in regard to herself, whether God would send her a son as Vok so passionately desired.

It was finally decided to pay the fortune-teller a visit, and all began to make ready for the expedition excepting Anna, who declared that for her there was no future, and therefore nothing to foretell.

The Count, when consulted about it, laughingly approved the intention of the young people, but insisted that Broda should accompany them as well, since in view of the frequent disorders it would be better for the ladies to have two swords instead of one to protect them.

Although the witch lived in a distant quarter of the town, it was such beautiful weather that they set forth on foot. None of them paid any attention to the fact that as soon as they left the house two monks began persistently to follow them, though at a respectful distance. Only Broda, who walked with Tullia behind Svietomir and the Countess, noticed them, and began to observe their movements; but finally he lost sight of the monks in the crowd, and soon afterwards forgot about them,

which was not surprising as monks of all sorts and conditions were swarming on every hand.

They were reaching the end of their walk when suddenly, from not far off, came the sound of a huge crowd approaching, which subsequently invaded the street, filling its whole breadth. They were surrounding something on all sides, but it was difficult to see what this was. The pikes and halberds of the Town Guards were seen glistening above the heads of the people.

Svietomir began with his eyes to seek some place of refuge in which they might avoid the crush, and wait until the crowd had passed. But at that moment people began to run out of neighboring houses, attracted by the noise; and in an instant he and Rugena were hemmed in by an excited and curious mass. At first they were pressed against the wall, but then suddenly, by some accident, they were pushed forward and forward into the first row of spectators.

It could now be clearly seen that soldiers were surrounding a wagon in which was sitting a man, bound and loaded with chains. Svietomir turned pale on seeing that the captive was Jerome. He seemed calm, and his pale, proud face wore a look of mournful abstraction. Rugena, too, had recognized him, and for the first moment stood petrified, gazing at him with wide-open eyes. Then with a wild shriek she fell senseless to the ground.

Notwithstanding the noise, the piercing cry reached the ears of Jerome, who glanced towards them, and also recognized Rugena.

He started and drew himself together, so that the rattling of his chains was heard. He tried to spring to the earth, but all his efforts to free himself were in vain. He sank helplessly back on to his seat, with an expression of wrath and despair on his face.

With great difficulty, and the help of the sympathizing spectators, Svietomir managed to clear a passage and carry Rugena to the steps of a neighboring house. The wagon with the prisoner was far off already, but the crowd which followed it was still filing through the narrow street. But suddenly the stream of people was arrested; something bewildering had happened; there was the sound of a woman's piercing cry, and then a loud voice was heard:

"Seize him, seize him!"

Then everything was confusion again as the crowds, advancing from behind, pressed forward, crushing those in front.

Svietomir strained his ears in alarm. In the powerful resonant voice he thought he recognized that of Broda. But it was impossible to distinguish anything. The crowd pressing around was highly excited, and kept shouting and waving their arms. A pale, distracted-looking woman who passed near them answered hurriedly to Svietomir's question:

"Some one is killed."

At that moment there was an opening in the crowd, and several men could be seen carrying the body of a

woman. To Svietomir's horror he perceived that it was Tullia.

She lay immovable, as though dead, and they put her down several paces away from Rugena, who had not yet recovered consciousness.

Svietomir, distracted, did not know what to do. He dared not leave the Countess to question the men who had been carrying Tullia. Suddenly, to his great joy, he noticed two Polish soldiers of Lord Tarnovsky's convoy. Calling to them, he placed them on guard near Rugena, and hastening to a group of people who were noisily discussing the event, asked how the tragedy had occurred.

"I saw it all, yet can make nought of it," answered one of the citizens. "She was not far from me, and seemed to wish to escape the throng, which was difficult as the crowd was very great. I was standing a little in front of her and did not notice her; but my neighbor, this one, nudged me with his elbow: 'Look you,' quoth he, 'there's a monk trying to carry off his light o' love. A scurvy lot, these black-frocks!' So I turned round and beheld a monk endeavoring to bear away a beautiful young woman, while his companion forced a passage for him with his elbows. She seemed dumb, whether with shame or fear I know not, and made no resistance; but afterwards she began to struggle and call for help from a friend of hers, I fancy; for some sort of warrior, doughty and strong as a bullock, though advanced in years, began to force his way towards her. The monks observed him

also, and one said something to the other in a strange tongue. Then something flashed in his hand, and they both vanished in the crowd like stones in the water. The woman stood for a moment as though nothing had happened, then threw up her hands and fell. We ran to her and saw that a dagger was thrust into her bosom. Then she was carried here, and the warrior disappeared with the monks.

Svietomir bent down and examined Tullia. It seemed to him that the wound, if not mortal, must be very dangerous, as the stiletto was embedded in her body as far as its handle. Her heart still beat, though faintly, and if she could be restored to consciousness she might be able to say who had attacked her.

Explaining that the wounded girl belonged to the suite of the Countess Waldstein, who was lying in a fainting-fit through terror at the crush, Svietomir promised a handsome reward and asked the spectators to help him to convey them both home. The request was heartily acceded to, and one of the citizens offered to run to Dr. Bonelli and summon him to the aid of the sufferers.

By this time the crowd had nearly dwindled away, and Rugena opened her eyes. In order not to alarm her Svietomir merely told her that Tullia had fainted, having received some slight injury in the crowd, and that he had already sent for the physician. The young Countess was too weak to proceed home on foot. A litter was procured for her and for Tullia, and the mournful procession set

out, accompanied by Svietomir, who was indignant at Broda's mysterious disappearance.

The doctor who had been summoned arrived at the house almost simultaneously with them. As Rugena was nearly dropping from weakness the doctor ordered her to be put to bed, saying that he would attend to her after he had bound up Tullia's wound.

Tullia still lay senseless. Anna, pale and distraught, was bathing her forehead and temples with water.

"She breathes, Signor Bonelli; but is still unconscious. I fear to remove her dress as it is adhering to the wound," she said, giving up her seat to the doctor.

Bonelli carefully cut away the bodice, and laying bare the gash examined it attentively.

"The wound is mortal. She will die when the dagger is drawn forth," he said to Svietomir, who entered at the moment.

"But can she not be restored to consciousness? Perhaps she might say something to explain the outrage," said Svietomir, gazing with pity at Tullia's lifeless face.

"I will try! Be so kind as to raise her a little while I administer a stimulant."

He took two bottles from the case he had brought with him. With the contents of one he moistened Tullia's temples and the palms of her hands, and then held the other to her nose. After a few moments a shudder ran through her body, and a moan of anguish was heard, her eyes opened and were fixed with a dim glassy gaze on the

spectators. But then she evidently recognized them, and their expression grew more animated.

"Brancaccio stabbed me!" she pronounced in hoarse, hissing tones. "He and Ilarius tried to carry me away. . . ."

Her strength failed her and she was silent. But then, reviving a little, she continued in a whisper:

"Everything grows dark . . . farewell . . . thank them all, and the Signora Rugena . . . for the kindness shown poor Tullia. . . . I will pray God for you there, and on them . . . the villains . . . I will be revenged. . . ."

These last words she pronounced in an unexpectedly loud voice, and there was a flash of wild hatred for a moment in her eyes that were already beginning to grow dim again. But it seemed as though this strain had snapped the thread of life. Tullia's head fell back and the blood spurted from her mouth; her body shuddered convulsively and grew rigid.

"All is over," said Bonelli, in a trembling voice.

When the young doctor heard Tullia's words that her murderer was Brancaccio he started and turned pale. Anna and Svietomir were struck as though by a thunderbolt at the sound of the Cardinal's name, and they stood beside the bed in dumb astonishment.

At that moment the door was flung open and Count Ginek entered, in a state of alarm. He had only learnt of the tragic event on his return home, and was hastening to make inquiries of Svietomir. He was deeply affected

on hearing of the murder, and of Tullia's last words upon her death-bed.

Having commissioned Svietomir to make arrangements for the funeral, he was about to depart again when Bonelli approached him and asked leave to speak to him for a few minutes. The Count, surprised, took the doctor into his room. When they were alone Bonelli said with evident agitation:

"I consider it my duty to warn you, Count, that your daughter-in-law's state of health is very dangerous. Countess Rugena hath been poisoned and . . ."

"Maestro Cosimo, you are at fault! How can she have been poisoned? By whom? 'Tis impossible; you are mistaken," said the Count with evident annoyance.

"I would I were mistaken, but unhappily what I have said is but the bitter truth! When I was summoned before to the young Countess some symptoms awoke suspicions of poison in my mind. But I deemed it impossible myself and would not speak of it till I was quite convinced. The antidote prescribed at once gave rise to vomiting, and part of the vomit I took away to examine it after a manner known to me. This morning I gained certain proofs that poison hath been administered to the Countess, such a dangerous poison that I will not answer for her life. I was preparing to bring this news to you when they came to summon me."

The Count turned pale, and listened with horror to the speech of the young doctor, the gravity of whose tone could admit no doubt of the truth of his conclusions.

"But what is to be done?" the Count asked helplessly.

"We must fight against it according to the measure of our strength, and—trust in God's help. I think I have discovered the sort of poison that has been given to the Countess. The countless cases of poisoning in our times have caused me to devote myself to the study of poisons. I will take the necessary measures, though I warn you that I cannot answer for their success."

It is easy to imagine the grief of the Count. The mention of Brancaccio's name in connection with Tullia's murder filled him with extremest dread. It was as though Rugena were now threatened, not merely by poison, but by some malign force; and it was with earnestness that verged upon passionate supplication that he besought the doctor to fight against this force by which his daughter-in-law's life was endangered.

Bonelli went to Rugena, and the Count summoned Svietomir to him, to tell him what he had just learnt, and his own conjectures on the subject. Svietomir was also overwhelmed by the terrible news, and did not for a moment doubt its truth. Brancaccio was quite capable of poisoning a woman whom he had striven in vain to possess.

Svietomir was already leaving the house to purchase a place for Tullia's grave and order her coffin when Broda returned, exhausted, but consumed with rage. Svietomir begged to know the details of his exploit; and Broda related how, having recognized Ilarius as one of the monks, he had pursued him. Through being hindered by

the crowd, however, he had not succeeded in catching the scoundrel, and although he had continued the chase for a long time Ilarius had eventually disappeared in some dark by-way, as completely as though he had vanished into the earth.

From inquiries, however, he had learnt that the empty house, the garden of which ran along by that same dark by-way, had formerly been inhabited by Brancaccio, who still remained master of the premises, as the rent was paid some months in advance.

"So that I have discovered the beast's den. I swear, as I hope to gain heaven, that I will not rest until both those ruffians have received the punishment they have merited."

Count Ginek had intended to inform Vok immediately of the Countess's condition; but as on the following day Rugena seemed to be almost entirely well again, and was busily making preparations for the funeral, he felt less anxious, and hoped that the danger had been averted by the timely measures of the doctor. So he wrote nothing of it to his son, in order that he should not be uselessly alarmed.

At the same time important events were taking place which absorbed the attention of contemporaries and kept the eyes of all Christendom fixed upon the little German town in which the Council was then sitting. In a solemn conference the Council of Constance tried the absentee, Pope John XXIII, and forbade him the further fulfilment

of his duties; while thirty-seven witnesses, among them twelve bishops, brought sixty-three charges against him. The Council, out of respect for the apostolic throne, and for the rank of Cardinal, struck out from the long list thirty of the crimes ascribed to the representative of Christ, and they remained a secret. But in order to impart some adequate notion of the nature of those points concealed it is enough to mention a few of the charges which were upheld and publicly proclaimed. Thus, it was held to be proved that Cossa had poisoned his predecessor, Alexander V; that he had shamelessly bartered places and Church property; that he had robbed, plundered, and murdered during his presence in Bologna, and had been guilty of criminal intercourse with his daughter-in-law; that he had seduced three hundred nuns whom afterwards he had made abbesses of different nunneries, and had committed many other outrages. In conclusion the Council declared that such a monster was unworthy of his rank, and released Christianity from its oath of allegiance to him, ordered his coat-of-arms to be destroyed, and the papal seal presented to him to be broken. This decree, together with the act of abdication, was carried by five Cardinals to be personally signed by Cossa in Rudolphstsel Castle, where he had been confined by the Austrian duke, who had now become his gaoler.

Pope John XXIII, now transformed into plain Baldassare Cossa, was then imprisoned in the very castle of Gottlieben in which his innocent victim, John Hus, was languishing.

While these weighty events were in course of progress all Bohemians were trembling for the fate of Jerome. After a preliminary investigation, the prisoner was handed over to Johannes von Wallenrod, Bishop of Riga, of infamous memory. This Bishop, with the concealed malice of a German and a Catholic priest, submitted the unhappy Jerome to an absolutely inquisitorial trial, thus revenging himself upon his victim for his Slav origin, his love for his country, and his adhesion to the Orthodox Church. At night Jerome was transferred to the tower of the cemetery of St. Paul, where he was enclosed in a dark, evil-smelling cell with his arms chained above his head in such a manner that they compressed his throat and even prevented his sitting down. It was only after two days that his friends learnt what had become of him, and took measures to alleviate his lot. But his torments nevertheless were such that he fell ill. While he was still struggling with death Hus was transferred to the Franciscan monastery.

Count Waldstein's fears were soon aroused again after their temporary lull. The slight amelioration in Rugena's health gave place to terrible weakness and constant fainting fits. At first Count Ginek ascribed these symptoms to agitation and the tears Rugena had shed over Tullia's tragic fate. Rugena was kept in ignorance of the fact that she had been poisoned. But Bonelli openly admitted to the Count that the poison was little by little accomplishing its work of destruction, and that

Rugena's condition was extremely dangerous. Count Ginek fell into despair, and no longer delayed in communicating the fearful tidings to Vok, and urgently summoning him to Constance.

A cloud of gloom and anxiety lay over the house. Anna and Svietomir could scarcely conceal their anguish, and lavished upon the invalid the most loving and devoted care. Sometimes, when Rugena seemed a little better, their spirits rose, and they began to hope; but with every fresh fainting-fit, followed by a prolonged attack of weakness, they were cast into despair again.

In Svietomir and Broda the fear for Rugena's life was mixed with the longing to punish the infamous murderer. With this object Broda often strolled about the town and the surrounding districts in disguise, hunting for traces of Brancaccio and his accomplice; but so far his efforts had been in vain.

One day when Svietomir had returned home from the Waldsteins and was sitting alone, sad and thoughtful, Broda suddenly entered dressed as a driver. He looked disturbed, but triumphant, and hastened to tell Svietomir that he had captured Ilarius in the most unexpected manner.

"I was deeply convinced that the house in which Brancaccio lived at one time, and which he doth still retain, serves them as a trysting-place. Therefore for the most part I kept near it. To-day I was tired by much walking, and went to rest and refresh myself in the drinking-tavern over against the house in which Cardinal Ursino

dwells. I sat and drank my wine, and marked a begging-friar come forth from the gates. At first I paid not much attention to him, for they are no rare birds here. But when, as he cast his sack over his shoulder, his wide sleeves fell back, I noted a great scar upon his elbow. 'Twas a revelation to me, for I recognized it as the scar of that same wound Ilarius received at the hunt—when the wild boar tore his arm. Then, knowing him in spite of his disguise, I began to follow him. He had evidently not observed me, for who would take notice of a common driver? The scoundrel went straight to Brancaccio's house. Slipping down the lane, he drew the key from his pocket and opened the gate in the wall. I did not let him shut it again, but pushed against it with such strength that he fell flat at the blow. Then I bound him, gagged him and dragged him into the house, making sure beforehand that it was quite empty. The scurvy knave, may God forgive me, had lost his senses from the fright; and though I shook him never so violently he gave no sign of life. But if you will give me your aid we will soon loosen his tongue."

Svietomir at once seized his cloak and his weapons, and they both set out for the house almost at a running pace. They found Ilarius in the same condition in which Broda had left him, except that he was conscious and lay with his eyes open. Removing the gag from his mouth, Svietomir ordered him to tell them where Brancaccio was, and what he knew of the poisoning of Rugena.

With his usual abjectness, Ilarius counted on acquiring

his freedom once again by making full confession. Pale with terror, he muttered that Brancaccio was traveling in Italy, where he was to follow him after having fulfilled his secret mission to the secretary of Cardinal Ursino. Then, quite openly, he proceeded to describe how Brancaccio, thirsting for vengeance, had resolved to poison Rugena and to punish the traitress Tullia by carrying her away and submitting her to a lingering death by torture. A servant in the Waldsteins' house had been bought with the aid of a monk of their acquaintance, and this woman had administered the poison to Rugena, who, accidentally, had only drunk a part of it. The attempt could not be repeated because Mistress von Laufenstein had left the town on a visit to a sister of hers who was sick, and had taken their accomplice with her.

As Tullia went out very seldom, and never alone, it had been impossible to abduct her. The Cardinal was furious, and daily haunted the house which contained his victim. On that fatal day they had followed the Countess and her attendants the whole way. Observing that Tullia became separated from her companions and lost in the crowd, the Cardinal had thought it a fitting occasion to make his attempt. And he had actually seized her, and while Ilarius made a way was dragging her along with him. Tullia, when she saw the Cardinal, was at first too terrified to utter a word, and the crowd had laughed and jested at their expense. When she began to scream and struggle, several people had come forward to her aid; but the Cardinal had cried to them that she was a run-away

nun whom he was taking back to her convent, so that the others had ceased to interfere. He might have succeeded in getting clear with her, had not Broda noticed them, and put them both to flight. Then, in mad rage that his enterprise was on the point of failing, Brancaccio had stabbed Tullia, resolved that she should not escape him alive.

"And even now he cannot forgive himself that all did not fall out as he desired," concluded Ilarius, exhausted, looking with terror at his auditors.

Then he wriggled to their feet and began to pray for mercy. Broda, paying no attention to his supplications, gagged his mouth again, unbound his legs, and ordered him to follow them unless he desired to taste his dagger.

On the following day passers-by were confounded by a horrifying spectacle. From the iron hook over the outer door of this empty house, instead of a lantern, dangled the body of a monk. When the body was taken down it proved to be that of the Italian Cardinal's secretary, who had formerly lived in the house. But it was never discovered who had committed the murder, and the affair was soon forgotten amid the general unrest and the extraordinary events that followed quickly one upon another.

V

THE latest news which reached Hus in the Castle of Gottlieben was that his sworn enemy, John XXIII, now plain Baldassare Cossa, was his companion in misfortune, and that they were imprisoned within the same walls.

Another man might have found pleasure in this retribution dealt by Fate; but the gentle soul of Hus was free from every taint of spite or malice.

"The earthly God hath fallen and lies groaning in chains," wrote Hus to his friends. "The Council hath deposed him for trading in indulgences, bishoprics, and profitable places; while they who have condemned him have themselves bought them of him and traded in them. Oh, perfidious brood! Why do they not pluck the beam from their own eyes! Should Lord Jesus say to the Council, 'Let him among you who is guiltless of simony judge Pope John, methinks all would flee, one after the other. . . ."

Hus's removal to Constance for trial roused the hopes of his innumerable friends. They were convinced that if only he were given the opportunity he would inevitably disprove all the accusations brought against him. But the very first sitting was a disappointment to them, since it showed that justice was the last thing the reverend fathers of the Council had in view.

In the morning of the 5th of June the cardinals, bishops, prelates, magisters, doctors, and other members of the Council assembled in the great refectory of the Franciscans. Among them were Peter of Mladenovic and Ulric, a young Bohemian priest, one of his friends.

The meeting was excited, and began the reading of the indictment and the examination of the witnesses before the accused had been led in. One of the members even proposed to go straight on to the consideration of the incriminating articles and to the casting of votes, the results of which could be later communicated to Hus. While this proposition was being discussed, Ulric, whom we have mentioned above, looking over the shoulder of the secretary at the indictment, gave a sudden exclamation and turned pale.

He turned hastily to his friend and whispered into his ear:

"I have just seen Hus's sentence already drawn up!"

Peter of Mladenovic, no less horrified, hastened to acquaint John of Chulm and Venceslas of Duba with the proceedings of the Council; and they went at once to Sigismund and succeeded in persuading him to put a stop to such flagrant illegalities. The prelates dared not oppose him, and Hus was led before the Council. Such a beginning augured no good to the prisoner.

Serious, absorbed, and full of dignity, Hus stood before his enemies, in the front ranks of whom were placed Paleck and Michael de Causis, seething with hatred and insolently derisive. The reading of some of the accusa-

tions was begun, and the enumeration of the witness's depositions in their support. But when Hus tried to give an explanatory answer, the scarcely concealed spite of those present was vented upon him in a torrent of insults and abuse which drowned his voice.

The noise and uproar was such that Luther, recalling the scene in one of his writings, characterizes it in the following bold words: "They all raged like savage swine, bristling, grinding their teeth, and sharpening their tusks against Hus. He alone stood calm amidst the tempest, and only looked mournfully at these people in whom he had hoped to find impartial judges, and in whom he found none but enemies."

When the uproar had subsided a little Hus observed mildly:

"In truth, I thought this Council would have been conducted in a manner more seemly and more orderly!"

Whether or no his judges, blinded by the spirit of party-hatred, felt the reproach contained in the simple words of the humble priest whom they desired to ruin, does not appear; but the senior Cardinal, Cardinal D'Ailly (Petrus ab Alliaco), shouted:

"How canst thou speak so? In the castle thou didst speak far more reasonably!"

"None cried out against me in the castle. Now all cry out together," answered Hus.

His answer provoked a new outburst of anger and abuse. The president, seeing that the excited condition

of the reverend fathers would effectually prevent the achievement of any result, closed the meeting.

The Bohemian barons in indignation complained to Sigismund, and he promised to be present at the second meeting, which was appointed for the 7th of June.

It is impossible to dwell in detail upon this revolting parody of a trial, which set at defiance all law, and even the most elementary forms of justice. The proceedings were conducted by pronounced enemies of Hus; their depositions alone were accepted. Hus, upon the other hand, was refused a hearing and deprived of every possibility of defending himself. They tried to force him to deny assertions which he had never made, such, for example, as that he was the third person of the Blessed Trinity, that he did not believe in God, and so forth. They accused him of having spread and defended the doctrines of Wycliffe, even those which he had himself rejected. It may safely be conjectured that the Council, which had taken a lenient view of teachings far more dangerous and criminal than the doctrines of the English philosopher (namely, those of Jean Petit), sought to punish in Hus not so much a heretic as a bold reviler of the misdeeds and vices of the priesthood.

Hus appeared four times before the Council, three times for examination and so-called self-defense, and the fourth for judgment and deposition.

The second meeting took place upon the 7th of June, and the presence of the Emperor, who threatened to expel all unruly persons from the hall, imposed some restraint

upon it. The prisoner's most implacable enemy, Michael de Causis, read the act of indictment, and Cardinal D'Ailly, who presided, submitted the prisoner to a rigorous cross-examination with the object of eliciting whether or no he were a Christian. Then there came to light one of the reasons which had provoked so much spite against Hus, namely, that he had been instrumental in driving the Germans from Prague; and this accusation was the signal for new and furious attacks, notwithstanding the fact that of the two points which he was permitted to answer he was able to exculpate himself. This gave birth to hopes of a happy outcome, but . . . the illusion was short-lived.

The third inquiry commenced with the reading of different extracts from Hus's book, *De Ecclesia,* and other works, in support of Paleck's accusation that Hus had denied the power of the Pope in the case of the latter's being guilty of crime. Hus answered warmly that the habit of bestowing the title of "Holiness" upon an unworthy and criminal Pope was pernicious; but he protested against opinions ascribed to him which he had never professed, as also against the incorrect interpretation and distortion of expressions used by him. He was cut short, and his voice was drowned by various offensive outbursts and vile insinuations on the part of Paleck and Michael de Causis.

It was a stormy meeting, and finally Cardinal D'Ailly called upon Hus to submit to the decision of the Council,

to admit that he had erred in those of his works presented to the Council, to renounce them publicly, and henceforward to preach and write the opposite of what he had preached and written until that day.

But notwithstanding the danger menacing him Hus stood firm for his convictions. While denying the power of the Church representatives present in the Council to force him to an act which he considered shameful, this dauntless champion of freedom of conscience against the powers of the Church of Rome, through his characteristic modesty, was unaware of the greatness of his historical mission. He was unaware that he was at that moment struggling for the deliverance of the Western world from a crushing yoke.

He answered simply that he was ready to submit to the Council and deny the doctrines he had hitherto defended, on condition that the Council would prove to him by the Holy Gospel that those doctrines were erroneous. But he begged them not to ask him to deny doctrines which he had never professed, as such falseness was forbidden by his conscience.

In vain the Archbishops of Florence and Cambrai tried to persuade him to make an unconditional submission.

"Hearken, John Hus," said the Emperor, who also wished to get the matter settled. "Wherefore dost thou not recant those false views which thou hast said the witnesses have unjustly ascribed to thee? I should be very

ready to renounce all errors and to swear that I will no more entertain them; but that would not prove that I had entertained them hitherto."

"Emperor! That is not the meaning of the word *recant.*"

Realizing that this play of words was proposed to him in order that he might be saved and the authority of the Council at the same time upheld, he firmly rejected it. Though it was obvious to him that his case was lost, he would not purchase his life at the price of denying the truth of his convictions.

Even Paleck was subdued by this firm stand of one against the whole Christian world. Either he was moved by pity, or else he felt a pang of conscience at the vileness of the rôle he played; but now he thought it opportune to state that he himself had no personal cause for displeasure against Hus, and that only the interests of Christianity had impelled him to demand his conviction. Perhaps the Fathers of the Council believed this declaration, for they praised his *restraint and humanity;* but posterity may permit itself to doubt in their sincerity.

But even supposing that Paleck, who was all the same a man of learning, a former friend of Hus, and born in the same village, may have been moved by shame and pity, it was ridiculous for Michael de Causis, that son of a German miner, a proven liar and swindler, and a sworn enemy of the Bethlehem preacher, to pretend to share his feelings and embark upon a dissertation on the voice of conscience, the general welfare, and Christian faith.

Hus contented himself by saying:

"God will be our Judge."

Sigismund closed the sitting with the following address to the accused:

"I did promise thee my protection during thy journey, and on thine arrival here, that none might offer the smallest offense, and that thou mightest freely expound thy views before the Council and answer as to thy beliefs. Thou hast seen thyself with what leniency and conscientiousness the Cardinals and Bishops have redeemed my promise to thee, for which I owe them much gratitude."

After this Bishop John von Wallenrod, who was commissioned to guard the prisoner, ordered him to be removed and conveyed back to his prison.

VI

In the dark, damp prison of the Franciscan monastery which he was fated to quit only to go to his death, Hus was sitting at a table reading the Gospel by the light of a small oil lamp—a luxury for which he was deeply grateful to his friends.

He had grown much thinner. His face, emaciated by illness, deprivation, and suffering both physical and moral, looked as though it were made of wax. But in his large, sad, dreamy eyes shone the same proud spirit which nothing could subdue.

He was not chained to his bed as he had been in Gottlieben; but he still had chains upon his hands and feet. He shut the book at last, and leaning upon the table became thoughtful. As the days had passed he had lived through many painful moments, and many feelings which he had thought to be vanquished and extinct had revived again and racked his soul. During the long months of moral agony his whole being was completely transformed —purified and made more spiritual. The earthly weaknesses at last forsook him, and all human desires were forgotten in his fervent faith in God, into Whose hands he committed his life and destiny.

A few days before, the Bishops had asked him whether he desired to confess, and he accepted the proposal joy-

fully. With that truly Christian meekness and humility which distinguished him even among the ranks of famous martyrs, he chose as his confessor Stephen Paleck.

"He is my bitterest opponent," said Hus, "and to him will I confess."

Even Paleck was touched by the nobility of his victim's soul. He would rather have refused the painful task of absolving the sins of a man to whom he had himself been the cause of so much evil; moved perhaps by remorse of conscience, however, he went to the prison of his former friend with the intention of persuading him to recant.

It was an affecting meeting. Hus begged his false friend's pardon for any chance rough or discourteous words which might have escaped him during his trial; but to Paleck's persuasions he answered:

"What wouldst thou do if thou wert pressed to deny heresies which thou hadst never preached?"

"It would indeed be difficult," answered Paleck; and burst into sobs.

"How couldst thou say that I believe not in God, and that since the birth of Christ there has been no more dangerous heretic than I?"

Paleck tried to deny having said this, and with renewed earnestness tried to persuade Hus to abandon his convictions.

Hus categorically refused and added:

"Why, why hast thou worked me so much evil?"

And Paleck departed from him in tears.

The agitating influence of this meeting was still fresh

upon the prisoner when, shortly after noonday Michael de Causis appeared in his cell, abused him, and with malicious joy informed him of his approaching martyrdom.

His bitter disappointment in humankind, his anguish at the betrayal of friendship, a feeling of protest against the Emperor who had treacherously incited his judges against him after having promised him protection, and against the unjust cruelty with which he had been treated, these emotions shook the steadfast soul of Hus. His spirit writhed in its agony. He was bitterly grieved at leaving the work, not yet accomplished, among his faithful followers and in the Bethlehem Chapel. A shudder convulsed his body at thought of the frightful torments which awaited him. . . . These were minutes of fierce struggle, of rebellion of spirit, of human weakness by which the elect of God are frequently visited; and Hus sought vainly in the Gospel for that support, strength, and tranquillity which he was wont to draw from it. He tried to pray, but that access of fervor which usually transported him above the earth and its sorrows was not forthcoming.

The sound of bolts being drawn back in his door roused him from his reflections.

"One of my friends hath come to visit me, and the turnkey will inform me of it," thought Hus.

But to his astonishment he beheld two female figures shrouded in cloaks. One was aiding the feeble steps of the other, who sank upon her knees in front of him and with trembling hands threw back her veil.

"Rugena!"

The cry broke from him, full of astonishment, and joy and grief. "My dearest children! How can I thank you for not having forgot the poor prisoner and for giving him the joy of seeing you! I have not even seats to offer you in this sorry place."

"There will be place for Rugena upon the bench beside you, for she is ill. But I will remain at your feet. Nowhere am I happier," said Anna, raising her friend and seating her.

Rugena was so weakened by agitation that Hus was obliged to support her.

She trembled at the sound of his fetters.

"You are in chains, Father John? Oh, monstrous! How can they deal thus with the most righteous of men, with a Saint!"

Hus shook his head reprovingly.

"Speak not thus, my daughter. Do not compare me, a grievous sinner, with the holy ones of God!"

"Oh, hush! What sins have you committed, and when?" cried Rugena.

Hus smiled sadly.

"All the sins common to men, my daughter! In my youth I loved fine clothes and society, and the game of chess. I was vain of my success in science and inclined to wrath. Oh, the list of my transgressions is long, and the pain which God inflicts upon me richly deserved!"

"You have long since redeemed it all by suffering!

Anna and Svietomir and I are resolved to arrange your escape, or your enemies will kill you."

Hus shook his head.

"I thank you for your devotion, my daughter. But know that even if the doors of my prison were opened I would not go before justifying myself in the eyes of all. I would not betray the truth to save my contemptible body, and give my brethren the sorry example of flight in the face of danger. Of what worth would be my life to me—stained, dishonored, and of use to none?"

"But they will commit you to a horrible death. All betray you and persecute you!" Anna could not refrain from exclaiming, with tears in her eyes.

"I know that the Emperor condemned me before my trial! But if my death can serve as an example to my brethren I will gladly sacrifice myself."

"Why is there no justice in the world!" moaned Rugena.

"Are lies and falsity ever persecuted? Of what importance is my death when Christ died on the Cross? And how numerous are the consolations God hath sent me! Hath He not sustained me, and sent me friends whom nothing can dismay, as, for instance, John of Chulm, who hath come hither to stretch out a hand to the luckless one by all abandoned and scorned as a heretic? And to-day you two have come. . . ."

He stopped, observing that Rugena had turned pale, and that her head drooped helplessly towards his shoulder.

At first sight of the Countess he had noticed the terrible change in her—her deadly paleness, her feverishly burning eyes, the presence of those indescribable tokens which death imprints on man. At that moment, with her eyes closed and her mouth half-open, Rugena seemed already dead. Yet she was beautiful, as before, with that wonderful ethereal beauty in which there was no trace of earth.

"That villain Brancaccio hath poisoned her, and nothing now can help her," whispered Anna, moistening Rugena's forehead and temples with water from the pitcher.

Rugena soon opened her eyes, and meeting the gaze of Hus, so full of alarm and pity, burst into sobs.

"Father John!" she cried, seizing his hands within her own; "you too see that my death is close at hand? I feel that he hath already laid his icy grip upon me; and yet I fear . . . I fear so much to die! I want to live! . . ."

Sobs choked her utterance. Hus was consumed with pity.

"Do not give way thus to gloomy thoughts, my daughter, imagining your passing weakness a foreshadowing of death," he said compassionately, bending over her. "The young have an inexhaustible reserve of strength; and I am full of hope that you will recover. But nevertheless let us not account Death a cruel enemy. He is a kindly spirit sent from Heaven to assuage our sufferings

and carry our souls home to our Heavenly Father. Death is terrible only to the sinner whose soul is heavy with transgressions, and will appear in shame and nakedness before the throne of the Almighty Judge. The gates of Heaven are closed to such a soul until it hath redeemed its faults by grievous torments. But you are young and pure and innocent, and have faith in God. You have nothing to fear in the future life on the threshold of which you will meet your beloved father. You need but pray with faith and assiduity, and God will do all for your happiness and benefit."

At that moment the door was slightly opened, and the gaoler's voice was heard:

"The time is passing, my good ladies!"

"In a moment, dear Robert. They are going," Hus said, rising.

Turning to Anna, he placed his hands upon her head.

"Farewell, my child! I thank thee for thine affection, which hath been a most sweet consolation to me. Stand firm in life and be a loving sister to Rugena."

He bent over her, blessed her, and kissed her on the forehead; and then turned to the Countess with tears in his eyes. Her heart was filled with anguish at this final parting. The thought that this was the last time she would meet his pure and loving glance and hear the voice of the friend she so deeply reverenced, who ever since her childhood had sustained and guided her in the difficult moments of her life, was intolerable to her. She felt as though she were losing her father for the second time.

She sobbed convulsively and throwing her arms round him leant her golden head upon his shoulder.

His heart beat painfully. He too was tormented at thought of parting with the one woman who had inspired him with a feeling which, though pure and disinterested, had reminded him, nevertheless, that he was a man. At that moment there awoke within him the great Force of life, which controls the world and the human beings who dwell upon it, and a faint flush dawned in his pale cheeks. His glance rested lovingly upon Rugena. He pressed her impulsively to his breast, and raising her drooping head gazed at her long and earnestly as though seeking to imprint her features upon his memory for all eternity.

But his iron will speedily triumphed over this momentary feeling. With trembling lips he touched Rugena's forehead; then, falling back a step, raised his hand as though to bless her.

"Now go, my children. May God bless, strengthen, and direct you!"

Anna, who was herself pale and tottering, took Rugena's arm and led her from the cell. Svietomir, disquieted by their long absence, met them in the corridor, fortunately just in time to support Rugena, who lost consciousness.

When the litter had set out towards home, Anna bent over Rugena, who still lay motionless.

"Happy girl!" she whispered, scarcely audibly, with trembling lips. "God hath created thee to be beloved of all. Even in *his* heart thou art first!"

Hus, left alone, sank onto the bench and covered his face with his hands. The agitation he had undergone still had strong hold of him.

"*Homo sum,*" he murmured, half in anguish, half in rapture.

Was this his final test in life? he asked himself, involuntarily; or was it God's mercy which had sent him this dying woman cut off by a criminal hand in the flower of her youth and beauty? The spirit which Anna and Rugena had brought with them into the prison was indeed a Heavenly blessing, and the knowledge that such loving hearts would lament him was a potent consolation. His feeling for Rugena had not a trace of egotism in it, and was imbued with desire for her welfare. God assuredly would pardon him.

Little by little peace was restored to his tortured soul. It seemed to him that the last ties which bound him to earth had been broken; that he was freed from the flesh and was being borne aloft into the bright domains of the other world.

Suddenly he remembered the wonderful vision he had had on the eve of Rugena's wedding, and its meaning became completely clear to him. The furious crowd swarming in the abyss and casting stones and filth at him were his enemies assembled in the Council. The fiery cloud which had enveloped him was the burning stake to which to-morrow, perhaps, his body would be bound. Yes, now everything was at last clear: he was to seal with his blood the truths which he had propagated. It remained for

him but to beseech God to sustain him in the torments to come.

He fell on his knees and sunk into fervent prayer, passing imperceptibly into ecstasy. In fervor his soul was uplifted above this earthly vale to those far-off regions where harmony reigns eternal, there to be immersed in the very source of the inexhaustible mercy of God.

But such bold flights to the Heavenly Father are exhausting to the soul of man, still burdened by the coarse trappings of the flesh; and the spirit falls from the starry heights prostrated by the transcendant effort. Hus, on returning to earth, felt how, little by little, the radiant brightness of that other world was fading, while the walls of his prison uprose menacing as before. Only that tranquillity was preserved which had filled his being.

He sighed deeply, wearied with excess of light; and, the lamp being by that time extinguished, groped through the darkness to his bed. As he did so, his attention was attracted by a slight crackling sound and a few steps before him there appeared a pale cloud dotted with sparks of fire which, revolving, grew and spread, filling the cell with a brilliant bluish light, and wafting to him a breath of pure, mild air. Against this bright background the tall figure of a man became by degrees defined, clad in Byzantine priestly vestments, holding in his hand the Gospel and a cross.

The face of the unknown was majestic and austere; but his eyes were mild and tender. His figure seemed filled with life and vigor. Awed and absorbed, still exalted

by his ecstasy, and but half realizing the presence of his visitor, Hus gravely whispered:

"Who art thou, Reverend Father?"

As though from afar, a deep voice answered him.

"I am he who was the first to spread the divine light of the Gospel in thy Fatherland, and whose dust now lies in Velegrad. Each son of that land—my spiritual daughter—is dear to my heart. To thee, about to die for the truth, and for God's Word, I have come to say: Be steadfast, and fear neither earthly sorrows nor bodily torments. Thy passage to the new life will be agonizing but short; and then will come the sweetness of reward. My presence and my prayers will sustain thee."

The vision grew paler, began to fade, and at length completely disappeared. But Hus was unconscious that the light had died away, and that darkness reigned once more. He had fallen face-downwards to the earth, praying and thanking God and the Apostle of his Fatherland for the revelation vouchsafed to him.

Neither fear nor confusion was in his soul. He felt courageous, armed with fortitude to bear his last, great trial. . . .

VII

On the morning of Saturday, the 6th of July, a crowd had assembled round the Constance Cathedral. On that day sentence was to be passed on Hus. The occasion was one of extraordinary solemnity, and a mass of idlers had gathered together.

Their expectations were not disappointed. The Bishops and even the simpler prelates arriving at the Cathedral were sumptuously attired. They were followed by Cardinals clad in purple, mounted on horses with costly trappings, and surrounded by knights, pages, and their priestly suites. Then came the Ambassadors from various nations, Princes, Dukes, and reigning Sovereigns, and lastly Sigismund himself, escorted by the highest officials of the Empire.

Solemnity reigned, too, in the interior of the Cathedral. Upon an elevated throne sat Sigismund, in the imperial mantle, while grouped around him stood the Kurfurst Ludwig of Bavaria, holding the orb; Frederick, Margrave of Nürnberg, scepter in hand; Duke Henry of Bavaria in his crown, and a Hungarian magnate with a sword.

A crowd of prelates, knights, and dignitaries in magnificent and brightly colored clothing formed a brilliant setting to the group around the throne.

In the middle of the Cathedral a wooden platform was

erected, and a complete set of priestly vestments was fastened to a pole upon it.

During the service the guard which had conveyed Hus from his prison detained him at the entrance, so that the presence of the "pernicious" heretic might not sully the sacred proceedings, at the conclusion of which the Bishop of Lodi mounted the pulpit. Then the prisoner was brought in and stationed near the platform. He fell upon his knees and prayed silently during the whole sermon, which was based upon the words, "Cast off thy sinful body," and which was distinguished throughout by extraordinary cruelty. The orator called upon the Emperor to fulfil his word, and mercilessly to exterminate all heresies and heretics. After this eminently Christian address the Bishop read aloud the resolutions of the Council, convoked and inspired by the Holy Spirit, exhorting all those present, under threat of curse or imprisonment, not to break the silence by any expression of feeling, such as applause, or by any movement whatsoever of their bodies.

Then Henry de Piro, Procurator of the Council, arose and demanded the condemnation of Hus and of his writings.

The unhappy prisoner was then made to mount the platform, and stood in the sight of all. The reading of the indictment, the contents of incriminating works of Wycliffe and other passages taken from the works of Hus, and the declarations of the witnesses began, and the ridiculous accusation that Hus had represented himself to be

the third person of the Blessed Trinity was not forgotten.

The unhappy man, hearing this tissue of lies, perverted interpretations, and slanders inspired by hatred, was driven to despair, and tried to protest and justify himself. But Cardinal Zabarella cut him short and severely ordered him to be silent. Then Hus fell on his knees and began to pray aloud for his enemies, committing his fate to his Heavenly Judge; but this only provoked laughter and derision among his hearers.

When the reading of the lengthy accusation was at last concluded the Bishop appointed to conduct the ceremony of the unfrocking of Hus called upon him to renounce his teachings. To this the latter answered firmly though mildly that he was always ready to renounce errors proved to be contrary to the Gospel, and therefore had accounted himself innocent of heresy and had voluntarily presented himself before the Council believing in the Emperor's promise to protect him.

As he spoke he directed a reproachful glance at Sigismund, and traditions say that the Emperor dropped his eyes, while a flush of shame dyed his cheeks.

Several German authors declare this tradition to be false, and we are willing to defer to their opinion. For Sigismund was not a man to blush for his perfidy, especially towards a poor and humble priest, who, nevertheless, had dared to say that *"if a king falls into mortal sin he is not a true ruler in the sight of God."* And the general conviction of Sigismund's contemporaries that he

had poisoned his brother John Gerlitzky shows of what he was considered capable.

In any case, if his conscience were at all able to move him it was not strong enough to awaken feelings of justice and humanity within his heart. He sat silent through the proclamation of the shamefully and iniquitous sentence condemning Hus to be "deconsecrated" and burnt at the stake.

The painful ceremony of deconsecration was carried out without delay. The Bishops clothed Hus in the priestly vestments and placed the chalice in his hands, as though he were about to say mass. Then, for the last time, they called upon him to recant; and the unhappy man answered with tears in his eyes that his conscience forbade him to appear as a liar before the throne of God.

After this the chalice was snatched from his hands, and the vestments were taken from him, to the accompaniment of words of execration. At length the point of shaving him was reached, and the Bishops disputed among themselves as to whether his hair should be cut with razors or scissors. Hus turned once more to the Emperor:

"Reconcile them, Emperor," he said, smiling. "They cannot agree how best to accomplish my dishonor."

At length they decided to resort to the scissors, and afterwards they placed a paper cap upon his head, adorned with painted devils and an inscription in big letters: *"Hæresiarcha."*

"The Lord for me did wear the crown of thorns, and

joyfully of my love for Him will I now wear this cap of shame," was his mild answer to this mockery.

The ceremony concluded with the words of the Archbishop of Milan:

"Henceforth the Church hath nothing in common with thee. She doth commit thy body to the worldly powers, and thy soul—to the Devil!"

According to the Swabian statutes heretics were handed over to the civic authorities, so that the Bishops thus addressed themselves to the Emperor:

"The Holy Council of Constance doth consign the deconsecrated priest, John Hus, to the civic powers, he being excluded from the jurisdiction of the Church."

The Emperor handed him over to Ludwig, Kurfurst of Bavaria, with the words:

"Most benevolent Duke! Take this man, and in my name commit him to the death befitting a heretic."

Ludwig in his turn delivered him to his executioners with the following words:

"Take Master John Hus, who, by the decision of our Most Gracious Emperor and King of Rome, and by my own order, is condemned to death by burning."

With bound hands, between four of his guards, escorted by a company of eight hundred men-at-arms, and followed by an immense crowd, Hus set out for the place of execution.

His emaciated face was pale but tranquil. His eyes, full of faith, were raised to Heaven. He continued to pray aloud, and the people, moved by his strength of

soul and piety, loudly expressed their sympathy with him.

"We know not his fault; but he doth pray like a true man of God," they said.

When Hus passed the Bishop's palace and beheld the flames that were devouring his works he only smiled. He knew that no fire could destroy the truth he had proclaimed in them.

The field between the village of Gottlieben and the gardens of the palace had been selected as the place of execution. Perceiving the stake already erected, Hus stopped for a moment. Did his frail body shudder at thought of the torment and death awaiting him? His temptation lasted but for an instant. His heroic spirit triumphed once again, and falling upon his knees he raised his clasped hands to Heaven, and murmured full of emotion:

"Christ Jesus, my Divine Master! For the sake of Thy Holy Gospel, and that truth which I have propagated, I accept this agony with joy and resignation. Leave me not in this great hour. Sustain me to the end."

Anna and Svietomir had been present in the Cathedral during his condemnation. The latter knew beforehand what was to take place upon that day, and had told Anna about it; and they had decided to be present. They said nothing to Rugena, who had been particularly ill during the last few days. They had not even told her that the fate of her beloved friend and confessor was irrevocably sealed.

In indignant agitation Svietomir followed all the details of the hideous farce. Absorbed in what was passing before his eyes he forgot the presence of his companion, when, glancing upon one occasion towards her, he started, so stern, so terrible was the expression upon the young girl's face.

The blood seemed completely to have deserted her face, which was as pale as a waxen mask. Only her eyes looked living, and from time to time were filled with an expression of despair, or glowed with unutterable scorn and hatred, as when they were directed towards the priests who were disputing as to the manner of cutting the prisoner's hair. At that moment Anna strikingly resembled her brother John: there was the same austere glance, the same cold cruelty in the expression of the mouth. In spite of her intense excitement she did not shed a single tear, and when Hus, delivered to his excutioners, left the Cathedral, she muttered to Svietomir:

"Let us follow him to the end."

"Were it not better to return home, Anna? The sight will be too fearful for thee," he said, feelingly, bending towards her.

"If *he* can bear it, can I not at least behold it and pray God to support the guiltless sufferer?" she answered firmly.

Svietomir made no reply, and drawing her arm within his own, joined the crowd which followed the condemned.

Slowly and with many halts the seething mass of people moved along the winding streets of the city, and when they reached the place of execution they dispersed into a wide circle around the stake.

Svietomir and Anna pressed forward, and the dense rows of people made way, almost with superstitious awe for the woman in her deep mourning, with her gloomy, burning eyes. But before they had succeeded in gaining the first row a monk on horseback turned into the crowd and began without hesitation to make his way straight through its midst; and Svietomir, profiting by this, drew Anna forward in the horse's wake.

In this manner they reached the front of the crowd and stood not far from Hus. The victim was at that moment considering the question of a last confession, proposed to him by the crowd, but hotly opposed by a priest in a light green mantle, who cried:

"A heretic must neither confess himself nor let others confess to him!"

Another priest, no less loudly, declared that if Hus wished to confess he must first recant his heresies.

Hus answered in a clear, firm voice:

"I am guiltless of mortal sin. And at this moment when I am making ready to appear before the throne of God I will not purchase redemption of my sins by lying declarations."

Taking no further notice of the priests, Hus asked to be allowed to bid his gaolers farewell, and, having obtained permission, embraced them, and thanked them for

their kindness to him. He wished then to address a few words to the people, but Palatine forbade this, and ordered that the execution should proceed.

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit and pardon mine enemies," besought Hus, raising his eyes to Heaven.

The paper cap fell from his head to the ground, and one of the soldiers thrust it on again, crying:

"Let it burn, and the devils as well, whom thou hast so diligently served."

The eyes of Hus, wandering sadly among the crowd surrounding him, fell suddenly upon Anna and Svietomir; and a joyful smile dawned in his face. He bent his head to them slightly in farewell, but turned away again as the executioner and his assistant began to tear apart his clothing.

They bound his hands behind him with a wet rope and tied him to the post, while a chain smeared with soot was placed round his neck. Fagots drenched with tar, and mixed with bundles of straw were piled about him. He stood calmly during these horrible preparations. Never perhaps had his heroic soul been firmer, more tranquil, more strong in faith.

Turning aside from the cruel crowd which demanded that he should be placed with his face to the West as it was not fitting for a heretic to look towards the East, he fixed his eyes on Heaven, and suddenly they began shining with an expression of ecstatic bliss.

Above the stake he beheld the majestic figure of Bohemia's first apostle. His deep, stern eyes gazed lovingly

at the martyr, and with the cross in his hands he pointed to Heaven.

Absorbed in contemplation of the vision, Hus did not notice that the pile of fagots had reached his neck. But suddenly a voice recalled him from oblivion.

It was that of the Grand Marshal of the Empire, Count Pappenheim, who had come in the name of Sigismund to endeavor for the last time to persuade him to save his life by recantation.

"Why do you trouble the great peace of my soul? I have nothing to recant since I have never professed heresy or taught the heresies of which they have falsely accused me. Joyfully do I seal with my blood those divine truths which I have spread by my lips and by my writings," Hus answered gently, though with firmness.

Trembling from head to foot, and with wide-open eyes, Anna watched the execution. At the first crackling of the flames she swayed and closed her eyes. Svietomir placed his arm around her to support her, thinking that she was about to faint. But Anna drew herself erect, and fixed her feverishly burning eyes on the stake. At that moment a clear voice singing a prayer was heard from amid the flames. This song, proclaiming in the midst of fearful torments the triumph of spirit over flesh, produced an overwhelming effect upon the crowd. It stood petrified in dumb amazement. The eyes of all were strained towards the column of smoke and fire from which no cry, no groan, no sound of complaint, nothing but that melodious appeal to the Heavenly Father could be heard.

Suddenly the martyr's voice was silenced—the smoke was blown into his face. A little while afterwards it could be seen that his lips were moving, and then his head dropped lifelessly.

Anna fell on her knees, covering her face with her hands.

"Come. All is over," Svietomir whispered, trying to raise her.

But Anna of her own accord rose and followed him in silence with bowed head. Tears were pouring down Svietomir's face.

"A saving gust of wind put an end to his agony," he sadly but thankfully explained as they emerged from the crowd.

Anna stopped and clasped his hand.

"That gust of wind in this quiet weather was a miracle," she whispered with unsteady lips. "Heaven's messenger came for the soul of the innocent victim of this infamous injustice. While Hus was singing I saw above the flames the figure of a saint of God with a cross in his hand, and a bright, shining angel, who waved his mighty wings and wafted the smoke into the face of the blessed martyr, and then received his soul."

Svietomir trembled and crossed himself, not in the least doubting the truth of her vision.

Rugena, left at home alone, Count Ginek being away, was seized at this time with an unaccountable feeling of alarm, and was unable to rest quietly in any place.

Itka, the devoted nurse, tried in vain to divert her, reminded her that Count Vok would soon be at hand, and begged her to go into the garden and lie down and rest. But nothing had any effect. Both in the garden and in her bed the Countess felt uneasy. Concerning the coming of her husband she remarked shortly that it would be a long time before they saw him, as in his last letter he had complained of the impossibility of getting leave.

At length Rugena sat down near the window and fell into a doze, while Itka took her place at her feet, and, suppressing her tears, gazed sadly at the pale, drawn face of her nursling.

Suddenly Rugena sat straight up, gazing fixedly into the distance as though she saw something terrible. Her lips were half opened, and her hands were stretched out appealingly. The old nurse gazed at her in horror.

"A stake! A stake! And Father John in the flames!" cried the Countess wildly, and with her hands clutched at her breast.

"Thou dost dream, my darling! There is nothing in the garden!" said Itka, in a quaking voice.

"Yes, 'tis he! I see him burning, bound to a stake," said Rugena, falling back senseless in her chair.

At that moment several horsemen in dusty cloaks, their horses exhausted and covered with foam, drew up before the house. Vok had arrived with his suite. He leapt from his horse and began impatiently knocking at the door. But he was obliged to wait some time before it

was opened, as most of the servants had gone to witness the execution.

The young Count in great vexation continued to knock furiously at the door, until at last it was opened by an ancient serving-woman, from whose toothless mumblings he could only make out that his father was not at home. Ordering that the servants he had brought with him should be fed and lodged, he told her to conduct him to the apartments of his wife.

Eugena lay as though dead in her armchair, while Itka, distracted, was moistening her face and hands with aromatic vinegar. The door flew open, and Vok came in, but stopped short like a statue on the threshold. He stared in dumb horror at his wife, and then, rushing to her, fell on his knees before her, pressed her wasted, motionless form to his breast, and covered her face and hands with kisses.

"She is dead! Dead! I am too late!" he cried, with anguish in his voice.

"No, no, my dear Lord. She hath but fainted. And now that you are come, with the grace of God, all will be well," said Itka, soothingly, kissing his hands, with tears of joy in her eyes.

She related how the fainting fit had been brought on by a terrible vision. It seemed to Vok as though a mountain had been removed from his shoulders; but he was nevertheless greatly alarmed at the terrible change that had taken place in his wife.

When Rugena opened her eyes and recognized her husband bending over her, she smiled gladly, and blushed. But beholding her gay and heedless Vok with tears in his eyes and an expression of misery on his face, she threw her arms about his neck and rested her head against him.

"Thou dost bewail our speedy parting?" she whispered. "That means that thou dost love me and art sorry for me?"

"Love thee?" Vok exclaimed, passionately, embracing her. "Speak to me not of parting! Thou shalt recover. I will have it so!"

But that day had still much suffering in store for the young Count. When his father, Anna, and Svietomir returned they related to him the details of the scandalous trial of Hus and of his terrible death.

Bitterly did Vok regret having arrived too late to bid farewell to the friend whom he regarded as a saint.

VIII

A FEW days later, rumors suddenly arose in the town that Jerome of Prague, yielding to the persuasions of the Cardinals, had recanted the erroneous doctrines he had professed, and had even signed an Act in which he accepted all the decisions of the Council and made submission to it. But, while condemning the articles of Wycliffe which had been propagated by Hus, Jerome made several reservations which showed how dear his decision had cost him. Thus, he continued to maintain that they had both preached many divine truths, and that, as to Hus, he had always loved him, and, while recognizing his errors, still preserved the most whole-hearted reverence for his character.

Notwithstanding these reservations, the Council seemed entirely satisfied with its victory and the subjection of the famous scholar. And after September 23rd, when Jerome, at a public sitting of the Council, solemnly repeated his recantation, and declared that for the future he would never seek to spread those erroneous ideas which he had just denied, his position in the prison was improved. The watch kept over him was less severe, and there were even rumors that he would be restored to freedom.

It was an agonizing time for Jerome. His proud soul writhed and pined beneath the humiliation of the public

renunciation of the cause to which his life had been consecrated. His heart was tortured by the delay and by the endless difficulties to be overcome before he could gain those few hours of freedom for which he had paid so dear. . . . He was tormented by fear and despair lest his sacrifice might prove to be in vain, lest those blue eyes, in which he had once read such a wealth of love, those dear lips which had intoxicated him by their words, might be closed forever before he could gaze upon them for the last time, before he could receive their last farewell.

Broda and Svietomir visited him and told him that Rugena was sinking fast, and his misery had reached its zenith when one night, towards the end of September, Svietomir entered his cell with the guard, carrying a parcel.

Svietomir was pale, and evidently disturbed.

"I have brought thee some clothes, Master Jerome. Don them quickly and come with me! This good fellow gives thee leave."

"Yes. My lord knight hath seduced me with a sum that to a poor fellow such as I, is a property in itself! But promise me, Master Jerome, that you will return. For even though there is talk of your speedy deliverance, yet without your promise I dare not let you go; and for my weakness I may yet pay with my life. Do not ruin me and my poor wife, and my six children."

"Give me thy sword, Svietomir," said Jerome. "Now, on this sacred sign of our redemption," he said, placing his hand on the cross-shaped handle of the weapon, "I

swear to return before dawn to the prison. May God visit me with His wrath if I betray my word."

The gaoler, reassured, helped him to don the black velvet suit and hooded cloak that covered him from head to foot. Then he let them both out, saying that he would keep ceaseless watch near the entry for the return of his captive.

Emerging from the prison, Jerome took deep breaths of the fresh, fragrant night air. After so many months spent in the dark, malodorous prison his head turned giddy, and he reeled.

But resolutely overcoming this weakness and the pain caused by the sores on his legs, he stepped quickly forward with Svietomir, and thanked him for the service he had rendered him.

"It was necessary to drag thee from that den to-night, for otherwise thou wouldst not have beheld Rugena. Vok says that she desires to see all her friends now, for the last time."

"What sayest thou? Is the Countess so much worse already?"

"Alas! This morning the doctor told Vok that she would not live through the night. The unhappy Count roves hither and thither like a madman; yet he thought of thee, and asked me, at any cost, to bring thee," answered Svietomir in a low voice. Clenching his fists as he spoke, he hurled a curse at Brancaccio, and a wish that he might succeed in visiting the vile murderer with the same fate that befell Ilarius.

Jerome had not heard of the death of Ilarius, and Svietomir began with peculiar pleasure to describe the details of the hanging of the obnoxious monk.

That same morning, the doctor, Bonelli, had considered it his duty to inform the Count that his wife had only a few hours to live. Although the sad fact might easily have been foreseen, the news fell upon Vok like a bolt from Heaven, and he could not control the frenzy of his grief. But it was a passing weakness, and he quickly persuaded himself that it was his duty not to trouble the last moments of his dying wife; but to render them as happy and tranquil as possible. He involuntarily thought of Jerome, and begged Svietomir to make arrangements for his coming, no matter at what cost.

Then he sat down by Rugena's bed, resolved not to leave her for one moment till the last.

The Countess awoke after a deep and heavy sleep. She was terribly weak, and this weakness was accompanied by a strange, heavy feeling which she had not hitherto experienced. An icy stream flowed through her veins and made her shiver. It seemed to her that something was rending her very being asunder. At one moment her soul seemed freed from her body, and then again a black curtain dropped suddenly before her eyes.

"It is the approach of Death!" she thought, with anguish.

She was about to explain her feelings to Vok, but meeting the frightened, despairing eyes of her husband, she could not bring herself to reveal the truth. She closed

her eyes and began to pray, beseeching God to make the swift approaching, terrible transition easy for her, calling with all her soul upon her beloved father and her martyred friend, John Hus, to meet her upon the threshold of the awful, unknown world. . . .

Her prayer restored her to tranquillity, and the rest of the day passed in peace. But when night fell, Rugena was overcome again with ever-increasing terror, and began to toss about in her bed.

Anna and Vok gazed apprehensively at the agonized expression on the almost transparent face of the sick woman, and at the restless movements of her hands beneath the bed-clothes.

At about half-past eleven the alarming symptoms increased.

"Lift me up! I suffocate!" she murmured, trying to rise.

Anna brought Rugena's silk dressing-gown and put it round her. Vok lifted her in his arms as though she had been a child, carried her to an armchair, and arranged the pillows, while Itka wrapped some rugs about her mistress.

"Art thou comfortable thus, my darling?" said Vok, falling upon his knees before his wife and supporting her. Her head dropped helplessly on to his shoulder.

"Yes," answered Rugena, feebly. "Where is Svietomir? Why hath he not come to-day? Call him . . . and call Broda, too. I want to see them all to say good-by."

"Svietomir will be here immediately, and perhaps he will bring with him some one thou wilt be rejoiced to see. Go, dear Anna, and order that Broda should come hither as soon as Svietomir and his companion arrive."

Rugena's eyes brightened gladly, and she fixed her gaze upon the door. She had not long to wait, for scarcely ten minutes had passed when steps were heard in the adjoining room, and Anna entered, followed by Jerome, Svietomir, and Broda.

Jerome had put the final touches to his dress in Broda's room, and his pale, worn face bore an expression of still greater suffering. On entering the room he stopped short in the doorway. He had not imagined the change in Rugena would be so terrible; and for a moment he could not speak. Quickly recovering himself he went up to her, bent his knee before her, and silently pressed her thin white hand to his lips.

Rugena, too, was horror-stricken when she looked at him.

"Dear God! How you must have suffered, Master Jerome!" she whispered. "But what can be done! I am very glad to see you for the last time."

Feeling his tears upon her hand, she gently withdrew it and placed it tenderly upon his bowed head.

"Do not weep, Jerome! Vok's grief and yours will make my death more painful and deprive me of the great happiness God hath vouchsafed me of gathering about me all those I love."

She was too exhausted to say more, and closed her eyes. Vok and Jerome gave a cry of alarm. On hearing it Rugena, with an effort of her will, struggled with her weakness and looked at them.

"It is nothing! A slight languor which hath passed," she whispered, as though excusing herself. "Come closer to me. Anna, Svietomir, Broda, I want to bid you farewell."

Supported by Vok and Jerome she embraced them, and thanked Broda for his unfailing and generous devotion to her.

Then she kissed Jerome on the forehead, and her long farewell glance rested lovingly upon him. Vok pressed her convulsively to his breast, and unable longer to restrain himself showered kisses upon her face and bathed it with his bitter tears. Rugena's courage finally deserted her, and with a deep sob she sank as though dead into her husband's arms.

The Count trembled, and in terror listened for her breathing. But suddenly Rugena drew herself together and stood up. Her wide-open eyes gazed into the distance, bright with joy and rapture. Vok involuntarily turned his head in the direction of her gaze and grew petrified with amazement.

At the end of the room in a broad halo of dazzling blue light stood . . . John Hus. He was clothed in the same manner as on the day of his death, but his garments instead of being black were of a snowy whiteness with

gleaming folds. His face of miraculous beauty had grown younger and was full of peace, and his deep, radiant eyes gazed with infinite tenderness upon Rugena.

The apparition, which was real, though light as haze, drew near the dying girl, beckoning to her with its hands and with its smile.

"Father John! Art thou come for me? . . . I am ready!" . . . whispered Rugena, stretching out her arms towards him.

But at that moment the figure disappeared, and Rugena fell heavily to the ground. . . .

For a few seconds death-like silence reigned in the room. They all had seen and recognized their friend, who had given them such striking proof that earthly attachments are preserved in that "world to come."

But although he had been so sacred and dear to them, the present appearance of their mystical visitor caused something like a panic among them.

Jerome was the first to recover his self-control. He crossed himself and looked irresolutely about him. Anna was upon her knees, seemingly unconscious of everything around her. Her eyes were burning with a strange, fanatical excitement. Vok had sunk into the armchair and was lying senseless. Fear was unknown to him when the living were in question, but the vision had unstrung his nerves. Jerome was about to go to his assistance when Broda and Svietomir, who had recovered from their stupor of amazement, raised him up. Then his eyes fell upon Rugena. Convinced that she

was dead, he lifted her body, still warm, into his arms, and pressing her to his breast carried her reverently to the bed, closed her eyes, and laid a coverlet over her feet.

Bending above the body, his eyes filled with tears, Jerome gazed for long upon the beautiful face which wore an expression of surpassing joy. Then he fell upon his knees and sank into fervent prayer.

Vok was not long insensible. For the first moment shame at having given way to such womanly weakness overcame all other feelings in him. But soon realizing his loss, his frightful nervous tension was broken by a burst of convulsive sobs.

Jerome appeared outwardly composed. Having exchanged a few words with Broda and Svietomir about the extraordinary apparition, he began to wish to return to his prison, feeling the necessity for being alone.

"My good keeper will be happy to see me again, and I wish to think and pray in solitude," he said, in a tired voice.

Forbidding Broda or Svietomir to accompany him, as he was able to find the way himself, he asked them only to provide him with a sword.

He took leave once more of the dead; embraced his friends, and thanked them for the priceless service they had rendered him; and pressed the hand of Anna, who stood apart, pale, with vacant eyes, as though just aroused from sleep. Then, folding his cloak about him, Jerome went out, followed by Broda, who accompanied him to the door of the house.

A week later a mourning procession left Constance. On a carriage drawn by two horses was placed the massive oak coffin, containing Rugena's body, which had been carefully embalmed by the doctor, Bonelli. Behind it, on horseback, rode Anna, Vok, Broda, and Svietomir, though the latter was obliged to return to the town after accompanying them as far as the first halting-place.

On account of difficulties of the road, the procession was obliged to proceed at a walking-pace, so that the journey was very slowly accomplished. The state of irksome inactivity to which Vok was condemned, and the constant sight of the coffin, lacerated the wounds in his heart, and acted exasperatingly on his nervous, restless nature.

Worn out by suffering, he kept silence for whole days together. Broda, who watched him, feared that if that state of things continued he would fall ill upon the road.

Once, when they had stopped for the night at a hostel, he tried to persuade the Count to hasten forward to Prague, where he would probably find important political events in course of progress.

"There your brains and sword may be necessary, Lord Vok; while here you can be of no assistance."

"That may be true, Broda. But how can I leave my beloved, before consigning her to the grave?" the Count said sadly.

"The Lady Rugena was an angel, or the holy martyr would not have descended from Heaven to fetch her; and angels attach no value to earthly usages," said

Broda, in a convincing tone. "She sees your heart, and how it sorrows for her. Confide her body's safe-keeping to my tried fidelity."

The Count's further objections were also overcome, and it was decided that on the following day Vok, with several others, should ride forward, taking Anna with him if she preferred it, and leaving Broda and the rest of the convoy in charge of the body. But Anna refused to go with the Count, preferring to remain near her friend.

"I will stay with Rugena! There is nothing that bids me hasten to Prague, now that it is empty of all I have loved; and I should but hinder you, Count," she said.

IX

Vok arrived in Prague after a hurried journey, having scarcely allowed his men and horses time for rest. The mad rush, though it exhausted him, diverted his thoughts from the sufferings he had undergone, and restored him some measure of spiritual equilibrium. In the endeavor to deaden the ceaseless pain of his bleeding wounds, he plunged head foremost into the seething vortex of political activities in which his contemporaries were at that time engulfed.

He had arrived in the fatherland in the nick of time. Never had the minds of men been more disturbed, and the first mutterings of the national storm which was destined to break out four years later were already beginning to be heard.

The young Count, like his father, became a member of the Union of Bohemian and Moravian nobles which had been formed in September for the defense of the purely Hussite doctrines. The first act of this Union had been the despatch of a messenger to Constance with a spirited protest against the execution of Hus, the imprisonment of Jerome, and the unjust calumnies of which their Fatherland had been the subject. And further, under the direction of three chosen leaders, Tchenek of Warten-

berg, Latzek of Kravarzh, and Bozhek of Podibrag, the Union of Bohemian-Moravian nobility declared that it would give full freedom in its domains for the propagation of the Word of God; confer upon the theological faculty of Prague the right to decide religious questions upon the basis of the Gospel; and finally, that it would submit to the decrees of none but the national Bishops, setting at nought all excommunications and prohibitions of the foreign priesthood.

This was a clear declaration of war against the Roman Church, and laid the first foundations of the National Church. The patriotic movement declared itself. The upholders of Hus and the chalice became a stronger and more dangerous party, for this time the peasants sided with the nobility against the King and Catholicism, the narrow intolerance and cruelty of which continued still further to inflame the minds of the people.

And in Constance in the mean time was being presented the final act of that sinister tragedy played by Catholicism before the eyes of the whole world, and entitled the trial of Hus and of Jerome of Prague.

The most far-seeing and diplomatic of the Cardinals, those of Florence and Cambrai, together with Cardinal Ursino, were for the liberation of Jerome. In their opinion, if he could be got to submit to the Council, both justice and caution dictated that an end should be put to the persecutions which were only driving the whole of Bohemia into rebellion. Paleck and Michael de Causis,

full of spite and thirst for vengeance, were against this wise proposal. They summoned monks from Prague, new and lying witnesses against Jerome, and dared to invoke in their support the voice of a fanatic as narrow and fierce as Doctor Naso, who did not hesitate in face of the whole Council to accuse the Cardinals who advocated the acquittal of Jerome of having been bought by the King of Bohemia and his subjects—heretics like himself.

The offended Cardinals immediately announced their resignation from the investigating committee, and the Council appointed new judges for Jerome, among whom were two pronounced enemies of Hus and Jerome—John Rokka and the Patriarch of Constantinople.

On the day after this sitting, which showed clearly what fate was in store for the prisoner, Svietomir had an interview with him, and, full of indignation, told him what had occurred.

Jerome listened calmly, almost smiling.

"Know that the worthy Naso hath rendered me a service," he said, cheerfully. "He hath given me the possibility to withdraw my recantation and to proclaim aloud my unalterable convictions."

To Svietomir's arguments he answered firmly:

"I wish for death, which alone will redeem my weakness and free me from the shame which my denial of the truth and of my holy friend and teacher, John, hath covered me."

On the strength of this resolution, Jerome refused to

answer his new judges, and demanded a public hearing. His demand was granted, and on the 23rd of May, 1416, exactly a year after his arrest, he appeared before the Council.

This controversy, which continued throughout two sittings—those of May 23rd and 26th—resulted in an undoubted victory for Jerome.

To the one hundred and seven accusations brought against him he answered with a presence of mind and a sustained power of reasoning that demolished the false and treacherous snares of his enemies, and laid bare the real cause of the hatred with which they pursued him.

His hearers were confounded and powerless to understand how, after a whole year's suffering and deprivation in a dark hole, he was still able to speak and defend himself, with as much ready wit and freedom of expression as if he had devoted his whole time to the study of his case and stood now in the pulpit instead of in the dock.

Never, perhaps, had Jerome proved himself a more brilliant orator than on that famous occasion. Armed with his scientific erudition, his enthralling eloquence, the compelling force of his genius, and his dazzling personality, he defended his case, knowing well that it was lost and that his life was forfeit.

His hearers, though inimical to him, were fascinated, conquered, and nearly ready to acquit him. But Jerome, it appeared, was by no means desirous of such a victory, for he passed from his defense of himself to the extol-

ment of Hus, who, like the prophet Elijah, had ascended in a fiery chariot before the awful tribunal of God to appeal against his persecutors and his unjust judges.

His words provoked an uproar in the Council. Some shouted and reviled him, while those who were well-wishers tried in vain to check this outburst of loyalty.

But Jerome was not dismayed.

"Do you think that I fear death?" he said, disdainfully; "even a death as terrible as that prepared for me by mine enemies and those false witnesses who will answer to God for their perjury? Have you not treated me with barbarity unpardonable in Christians? Have I not rotted alive in prison a whole year? I have not complained, deeming complaint beneath my dignity. But I have no desire to buy my life with lies, and here I declare that of all the sins I have committed, the greatest and most unpardonable was my base recantation, my shameful weakness in denying the teaching of that saint, my former friend and teacher. You condemned Hus and Wycliffe, not for having undermined the teaching of the Gospel, as you pretended; but exposing the presumption, the venality, and the viciousness of the priesthood. These accusations were not disproved, and I too maintain them as did they."

It is impossible to describe the scene that followed. A witness of the event, Poggio, an Italian, writes in his memoirs: "Jerome stood, calm and pale amid the hurricane, proud and unwavering. It was clear he cared not for death, and even welcomed it. Though repeat-

edly interrupted by the attacks hurled upon him from all sides, he answered each, causing some to blush, and others to hold their peace!"

Followed by cries of "he hath condemned himself," Jerome was led back to his prison and cast into chains.

Five days later, on the 30th of May, after another vain attempt to force him to a recantation, he was condemned to death at the stake.

X

THREE years had passed since the death of Jerome.

The night of the 28th of July descended upon Prague. The town was silent; everything seemed asleep. The streets were empty, and not a light was to be seen in any window.

Yet the sleeping town did not produce an impression of peace and repose. The City Guard passed more frequently than usual, and scarcely had they departed when shadows glided from dark corners, crept along by walls, and disappeared into houses where they were evidently awaited, for doors were opened at given signals and closed immediately behind them.

The same movement was to be observed in the neighborhood of the Waldsteins' house. That huge building, too, seemed wrapped in slumber, yet people hidden in cloaks were to be seen, creeping stealthily down the narrow dark alley which ran along one side of it, and disappearing into the house, after knocking three times at the little door in the wall.

It was the same door through which Tullia had entered to warn the family of the Cardinal's contemplated attempt upon Rugena. And it was Broda, too, who now opened the door to admit and direct those who arrived. But instead of ascending the staircase to the apartments

of the family, these nocturnal visitors traversed a long corridor, and descended into the cellar by the stone flight at the end of it.

By the light of three candles which stood upon a table in the center it could be seen that several people were assembled in the low-vaulted chamber, around the walls of which barrels and vats were ranged. The guests were sitting on wooden benches at a long oak table which ordinarily served the butler for the pouring of wine into bottles or jugs. Broda, after carefully bolting the massive door above, entered last, and sat down at the end of the table.

Count Ginek was sitting at the middle of the table, while on both sides of him were Nicholas Hus, John Zizka, Milota Nakhodsky, the priest John Zelivo, three other gentlemen, and a townsman, with a clever, swarthy face.

Vok was standing opposite his father, speaking with great warmth.

The young Count had grown much thinner. His big black eyes had lost their expression of gaiety and daring, and his mouth its scornful smile. He looked courageous, as before, but gloomy, and even stern.

"The news I bring you augurs nothing good, and seems to me to call for immediate action. The King is so incensed against us that we may expect none but the harshest measures from him," he said, with a note of derision in his voice. "You know that we are beset with spies who penetrate into our meetings, observe our actions, and give detailed, though not always accurate, ac-

counts to the King of all that passes. Venceslas of late hath been so timid, so excited and suspicious, that it was painful to be near him. His wrath hath been aroused by one who informed him that we purpose to deprive him of his throne and to set upon it Lord Nicholas, or thee, Zizka. For thou too, it would appear, art thirsting to adorn thyself with Bohemia's crown."

A sly smile appeared upon the clever, expressive face of Nicholas Hus.

"Terror and an unclean conscience—'tis they originate such scares!" he said.

Growing more heated, he continued:

"Woe to the land that hath a foreign ruler! In the depths of his heart he will always incline to the race which gave him birth and bear a half-conscious inimical dislike to the people whose crown he bears. Venceslas—a German of Luxemberg—is a clear proof of my words. Though he is not in reality an evil man and can at times be just, yet he is a stranger to the Bohemian people, to their glory, and to their interests. He is ever entangled with Sigismund, and his Teuton blood doth draw him to the Germans who infest our fatherland like locusts. He knows that the Catholic priests are servants of the Romish Antichrist, and the most hopeful support of the German robbers whom they brought hither, and who would harness us like oxen or slaves to their triumphal chariot. And what then? Venceslas doth still protect those scurvy priests, and deny his favor to such men as Nicholas."

Zizka's solitary eyes shone wrathfully as he clenched his fists. John of Zelivo grew livid.

"Down with the German yoke and the traitor Venceslas, who knows his guilt towards us, and therefore fears us! He hath summoned Sigismund with his horde of barbarians to help destroy us," he cried in a voice hoarse with indignation.

"Calm yourself! What you say is very true. Venceslas hath no fatherly feelings towards us, and cannot have them. He is against us as he was against the Poles, with the Lithuanians and the Teuton Order, and will always sacrifice a hundred Bohemians to one German. Yet we must not act against him, for Sigismund is a thousand times worse, and the people are attached to the old King for the crumbs of justice he hath thrown them, and the affection he doth outwardly profess," said Nicholas Hus, calmly. "He must not be deprived of the throne; but we must force him to change his policy, and remove the Catholics from his Council and replace them by men devoted to our sacred cause. And we can accomplish much, for the whole peasant kingdom is behind us! But in order to hinder the King's intentions we must know them; therefore continue your work, Sir Count, and let us know all you may learn."

"They are watchful of me in Kunratitz, and the King in his present mood doth trust nobody, even our gracious Queen; therefore 'tis not easy to gain much information," Vok began. "But I have learnt from trusty sources that Venceslas recently received a letter from his brother, and

communed long with his Councilor Jan Lazan; after which he decided to reform the Town Councils of the Old and Small Towns in the same manner as that of the New Town. That is to say, by replacing *our* people by those *'mahometans.'*"

"I can give some explanations of that which the Count hath told us," remarked the townsman, who up to that time had been silent. "One of my friends is writer to Lazan, and he told me that the reform of the Town Council was in truth being prepared, and that most stern measures would be adopted against us. Yesterday the pupils were driven from a Hussite school that is given over to the Catholics. We are to be forbidden public processions—and even religious gatherings; and the Germans . . ."

"What? Forbidden processions? Let them but try it, and they will bitterly repent it! I have arranged a procession for next Sunday, and it shall take place, I swear to you!" cried John of Zelivo, unable to restrain his wrath.

"Gently, gently, Father John! Be assured that your procession shall take place; but let Peter Kuss tell us what he knoweth of the Germans," Count Ginek said impatiently.

"I know that Leinhardt hath called upon his friends to provoke a collision on Sunday," said Kuss, a rich butcher, devoted to the Hussite cause. "The German townsmen have already held a meeting, and the butchers

and pastry-cooks have agreed to cause disorders, and that old dog Kuntz hath formed relations with Judge Niklashek, who, like a true Catholic, will hear of nothing beyond his Rome, and doth encourage the Bohemian traitors in the Council to denounce us. Sunday will be a stormy day, and I wanted to acquaint you of it."

"Thank you for your valuable information," said Zizka. "We will prepare, and the conspirators shall not take us unawares! I propose, my brothers, that all of us shall be armed, and ready for self-defense. And to show that our enemies are not so terrible, we will go to the Town Hall and request the Councilors to free those unhappy men they arrested a few days since, pretending that they had provoked disorders."

"Yes, yes! A good thought, John!" said Vok. "My poor old Matthias is among the prisoners, and I would gladly free my dead wife's faithful servant, who was only taken for protecting one of ours from the minions of the Cathedral."

"We will free him! And now, my friends, let us decide upon the necessary measures. We have much work before us, and only to-morrow remains," said Zizka, who thirsted for action.

They all turned to him and the discussion was continued in lowered tones.

When the leaders of the Hussite movement separated an hour later they had worked out a detailed plan of action.

Sunday, the 30th of July, dawned bright and warm. Long before the hour of mass worshipers were hurrying towards the Church of Mary the Snow-white Virgin, which was reserved for the ultraists by order of the King. An observer might have been surprised at the small number of women in the crowd, and at the gloomy, preoccupied faces of the townsmen and shopkeepers. They all were armed; some with swords and daggers, some with javelins and pikes, and others simply with sticks.

The church was soon packed to overflowing, and the crowd kept increasing till it filled the porch, the street, and even the adjacent lane.

At the end of the service John of Zelivo mounted the pulpit and began his customary vehement address.

To-day he was more than usually excited. His thunderlike voice reached the street through the wide-open doors, and every word penetrated to the hearts of his listeners. He spoke of the misery of the times in which they lived, and of the persecutions to which true servants of Christ were submitted.

It is difficult to describe the impression produced by his passionate words upon the excited and fanatical crowd which filled the church. He was gifted with the power of moving masses by his thrilling and enlightened eloquence, and inspiring them to action.

So far everything was outwardly tranquil, though faces were heated and impetuous hands clutched their weapons; but lips were singing hymns, and the procession moved

off headed by John, who walked before it in his vestments, holding the chalice in his hands.

The human river flowed slowly through the streets of the New Town, but, on reaching the Church of St. Stephen, suddenly halted. The church gates were closed by order of the priests, who desired thus to demonstrate their displeasure of the Hussites.

The moment for such a challenge was badly chosen. At first a low murmur was heard among the people, a murmur which gradually rose to a roar. The crowd pressed forward, and in a moment the heavy gates were broken in.

Had the prior fallen into their hands he would certainly have been killed; but, fortunately for him, he had hidden himself, and the crowd, pleased with its first success, passed on.

Vencelstein Castle, the new royal residence, had been recently built near the village of Kunratitz by Venceslas.

The King was sitting by a window with several courtiers about him, listening to the reading of a book of hunting stories. But he paid small attention to the reading. His eyes roved here and there with an absent and dissatisfied expression. At one moment he opened them wide and gazed before him vacantly, at another he screwed them together, contracting his bushy eyebrows in a peculiar manner. His fingers played nervously with the handle of the stiletto which hung from his waistbelt.

Venceslas was by now nearing sixty.

His face had grown flabby, and his complexion was of

a purplish tinge. His lower lip hung down and his eyes, with their yellowish whites, were inflamed and dim as though with age. They grew bloodshot at the least excitement. An expression of vindictive mockery was seen in every feature of his face.

The King's character had changed not less than his appearance. His good-humor, which at times had been mixed with a certain merry slyness, his love of truth, his joviality, his looseness of speech, and his liking for ribald anecdotes, had changed into a morose suspiciousness which, thanks to his excitable temper, frequently led to fits of ungovernable fury.

Nobody was free from his suspicion; not even his pious and gentle wife, whom he rudely accused of heresy and of acting hand in hand with his enemies. Queen Sophia endured her husband's outbursts uncomplainingly. She suffered in silence, and in prayer alone sought strength to bear her bitter fate. This very morning a painful scene had taken place, the more painful for having been witnessed by several courtiers.

Sophia retired, deeply mortified, to her apartments, and restraining her tears endeavored to divert her thoughts by working upon an embroidered altar-cloth for the chapel of the castle.

A young maid, the niece of Lord Wartenberg, was with her; but seeing that the Queen was disturbed she dared not break the silence, and looked instead from the window at what was taking place below in the courtyard.

"Your Majesty!" she suddenly exclaimed, "Count

Waldstein hath arrived. Methinks he came in great haste, for he is gray with dust, and his horse covered with foam."

The Queen raised her head, and glanced at the young girl. A sad smile played upon her lips.

"Oh, Gracious Lord! Hath something occurred in Prague?" she murmured. "The King will be distraught again. He is already indisposed, and the doctor hath forbidden all excitement to him."

After a moment's thought Sophia rose, and lifting the train of her long velvet dress, hurried to the King's apartments. Mary followed her like a shadow.

Without entering the room in which the King was sitting she stood listening behind the lowered hangings of the door. The reading had been interrupted by the entrance of a page, who reported that Count Waldstein was below and begged immediate admission to the sovereign.

"Let him enter," Venceslas commanded. "Though he is no longer the old Vok, yet he may bring us some diversion, and may dispel this mortal tedium."

Shortly afterwards young Waldstein entered; but at sight of his dusty clothing and gloomy, abstracted face the King frowned.

"Thou hast a dismal face, my friend. And methinks thou wilt anger instead of enliven me. Yet let me quickly hear thy woeful news. By thine aspect I judge that thou hast made great haste to bring it to me."

"Sire, thou speakest truly. My news is very sad."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the King, mirthlessly. "Have

the people of Prague made Nicholas Hus king in my place?"

His sunken eyes gleamed angrily.

"Your Majesty doth deign to jest! Such an idea could sprout but in the brain of a too zealous informer. In any case not I would bring such news to you," said Vok, slightly frowning.

"Excellent! I am beset with proofs of the loyalty of all about me. But inasmuch as I am still King I order thee tell me in what manner my *loyal* subjects of Prague have acted, to express their devotion," Venceslas growled angrily.

Respectfully, but without admitting or softening any details, Vok described the terrible happenings of the 30th of July, and as he proceeded the King's face became more and more purple. The courtiers who were present grew petrified with terror and amazement.

"Ah, Scoundrels! Traitors!" he roared savagely, clenching his fists. "They dared to disobey me and slay the Councilors by me appointed? Well, this time the accursed rebels shall pay dear for their audacity. I will teach them to defy my orders! I know the vile instigators of these riots and murders: Yakubek, John of Jesenice, Nicholas Hus, John of Zelivo, and the other scurvy dogs! My patience is at an end at last. I will exterminate the brood of heretics. I will have them hanged, broken on the wheel, impaled. . . ."

His voice was choked, and he could not proceed.

Vok flushed at the King's last words, and the wrath of Venceslas was suddenly turned upon him.

"Thou too art of that band and thy father! You both were given body and soul to that profligate blasphemer Hus, thanks to whom all these miseries have fallen on Bohemia. You always sacrificed my peace and interests to him and to Jerome, that vicious babbler!"

Vok drew himself up and looked darkly at the King.

"Sire! I am a Bohemian, and ready to defend the sacred memory of my country's most illustrious sons with my blood. 'Tis *not* the pure and exalted teaching of Hus, *not* the devotion of his followers to the Gospel truths, that have caused the misery and degradation of Bohemia! Foreigners, and a dissolute priesthood who were checked in their vices, now seek to revenge themselves by sowing strife in the country and inciting brother against brother. These are the real malefactors. But all that has happened could have been foreseen. And you, Your Majesty, yourself have lit the torch of rebellion, by forcing rulers upon the people who were inimical to their faith and who now have given rise to the storm of universal indignation. . . ."

He had not time to finish, for Venceslas, who had been listening to him in petrified amazement, suddenly flung himself upon him with a yell.

"Traitor! Rebel! Dost thou still dare insult me to my face?" he hissed, half stifled with fury.

He seized Vok, by whom the attack was totally un-

expected, by the throat and flung him to the ground. Exclamations of horror rose from the bewildered courtiers, and the pale Queen sprang out from her place of hiding, with a shriek.

"Separate them!" she cried.

The courtiers bent over the King, who at that moment was feeling for his stiletto to plunge into the half-suffocated and unconscious Vok.

The King wrenched himself from their restraining hands with a savage bellow. But suddenly his face grew livid, and twitched convulsively; and in a fit of apoplexy he rolled over and lay like a corpse.

He was carefully upraised and borne away, and while the doctors, summoned to his bedside, busied themselves around him, the Queen went into the room to which the young Count had been carried, and where he had regained his senses.

Vok was standing near the window, deadly pale, and evidently preparing to depart, as he had put on his cloak and hat, and was drawing on his gloves. He had waved aside the glass of wine which one of the courtiers was offering him.

On seeing the Queen, Vok bared his head and bowed respectfully.

"Leave us," the Queen ordered the courtier.

As soon as they were alone she approached the Count, and stretching out her hand to him said:

"You are departing, Count? Have you recovered sufficiently to mount your horse?"

Vok bent one knee and kissed her hand.

"I thank you, Your Majesty, for your gracious solicitude. But I am quite recovered, and would beg your permission to return to Prague."

"However I may regret your departure, I would not detain you. I wish but to tell you that I am deeply grieved at what hath happened. But the King lost all self-control. He hath been ill of late, and therefore fretful. To-day's excitement may cost him his life."

She stopped and wiped away a tear.

Sophia of Bavaria was beloved by the Bohemians. Her constant intercession on their behalf, her attachment to Hus and to the national cause had won her such popularity that Vok's anger half melted at sight of her tears.

"God forbid that Your Majesty's forebodings be justified!" he said hastily, to soothe her. "The King, I hope, will recover, and I shall never forget that he signed the momentous decree of the 18th of January, 1409. Therefore I nourish no resentment against him for the insult he inflicted upon me. But as a loyal subject of Your Majesty I consider it my duty to warn you that events in Prague demand the greatest circumspection from the King, if His Majesty desires not to raise a tempest."

"Alas, I fear me he may take stern measures, and I myself am powerless now. For thanks to his morbid suspiciousness he trusts not even me."

"Confer with His Majesty's counselors. Perhaps His Majesty will follow their advice."

"I will endeavor to do so! But tell me, Count, how did the disorder end? The King's mad outburst cut short your story."

"It is not mere disorder, Your Majesty. It is more like an insurrection! The power granted to the Catholics and their provoking actions, which stopped not even before the desecration of the blood of Christ, have roused the people. And they are resolved henceforth to defend their faith and liberties with weapons in their hands. As I quitted the city the Town Hall was occupied by a detachment of the insurgents. Four leaders were elected, and they had formed a provisional government, while all citizens, under penalty of death or banishment, were called to arms. You understand that the leaders of the movement would not dare to adopt such measures had they not found support in other towns, as well as among the peasantry of all the realm."

The Queen turned pale.

"I understand the danger, and will follow your counsel! Farewell, Count, and forget not that whatever happens you will find in me a friend."

The afflicted Queen went with drooping head to the apartments of her husband, while Vok mounted his horse and set out for Prague.

His head was bowed, and therefore he did not see the pale, agitated little face of the young maid at the window of the Queen's room. Her sad eyes followed him, filled with tears.

Thanks to timely aid Venceslas recovered conscious-

ness, and, apart from a slight paralysis of his left side, seemed restored.

But his state of mind was terrible. He trusted no one who approached him, and saw in every one a traitor or a rebel. He was the prey alternately of fits of mournful anguish and despair and outbursts of wrath and fear.

The Queen relied on Sigismund alone, and sent a messenger begging for his assistance, forgetting that the King had no more bitter enemy than his brother.

By this time the counselors of the King, at the Queen's solicitations, had entered into negotiations with the people of Prague, who had agreed to make submission and sue for pardon on condition that they should be allowed to install Town Councilors chosen by the people. This request was granted, and the King confirmed the new appointments. The new Burgomaster proved to be Peter Kuss, the butcher, and his election was obnoxious to the King, who did not like him.

On the morning of Thursday, 17th of August, Anna of Trocnov was sitting by herself, sewing some childish garments, and murmuring the words of the penitential psalm. She was disturbed suddenly by a heavy knock upon the door which caused it to open, and she turned in displeasure. Seeing, however, that the new-comer was her friend, who, pale and agitated, hastened towards her, she asked anxiously:

"Hath anything occurred?"

"Yes, something most serious. The King is dead," answered Marga, sinking into an armchair.

Anna piously crossed herself.

"May God have mercy upon him, and rest his soul, and pardon him his many sins! When did he die, and who told thee of it?"

"Count Vok. He is below with Milota, describing the King's death in full detail. Thou knowest that a few days since the Queen did summon him to Kunratitz for that the King had suddenly restored him again to his favor and demanded insistently that he should be brought. When the Count reached the castle he learnt that the King's health had grown worse and worse since he was forced to confirm the appointment of Kuss, the butcher, which threw him into a fit of fury. He suffered from constant vomiting, and a pain in his left arm. But nevertheless on the morning of the 15th he felt better, so that the Queen ordered that communion should be administered to him. Count Vok arrived just before the ceremony, and the King said a few gracious words to him. Then he piously confessed, but could not take communion, for the vomiting came on again; and yesterday morning he had a second stroke. The Count was with him to the end, and is still disturbed by the remembrance of the horrors of the King's last moments. He shrieked so wildly that the sound was heard several rooms off; and his last breath was a cry of anguish. Count Vok went immediately to inform his father, and then came on to tell us. But it seemed the sad tidings had already spread through the town, for the Count saw many people

in the street, and a crowd hath gathered in the square. Come and see."

When they entered the room from which they had watched the Councilors being flung from the Town Hall a fortnight before, they found Vok and Milota standing at the open window.

"The day will not pass without disturbances," the Count was saying at that moment.

And certainly the aspect of the great square was far from reassuring. Armed citizens were running towards it from all directions, and the remainder of the people, among whom were many women and children, had gathered in groups and were talking excitedly and waving their arms. The crowd was greatly excited: many of its members shook their fists theateningly in the air, while the sound of a thousand voices was mingled in one terrible roar.

Various ragamuffins not seen at ordinary times had appeared like birds of ill-omen among the people, and were making speeches. The name of Venceslas, and terrible threats against the Catholic priesthood, reached the ears of the listeners at the window of Milota's house.

"I must go and see what is happening there, and talk with John and the Burgomaster," said Waldstein, taking up his hat. "Wilt thou come too, Milota?"

"If you are going to John, then take me with you. For I must see my aunt, who is ailing."

"Of what art thou thinking, Anna? How canst thou

run about the town in these unrestful times? Thine aunt will not die if thou delay thy visit to her."

"Who can answer for to-morrow's being more tranquil? And I cannot leave my aunt alone to-day, for she is terribly afraid when there are disorders in the town. And I fear nothing, especially under such protection. The streets are full of women, as you see, and I am well known among *our* people, so that they will not touch me. As for the Catholics," and there was a note of scorn in her voice, "they will have no time to-day for me."

Paying no attention to Marga's persuasions and entreaties, Anna ran for her cloak, and left the house with Vok and Milota, who had only laughed and shrugged their shoulders at her request. For it was well known that Anna was no less obstinate than her brother John.

In the mean time the crowd had gathered once more in front of the Town Hall.

As they pushed their way through the people Anna and her companions heard many ugly stories as to the King's death, and many expressions of hatred towards the papists.

In one of the neighboring streets their way was hindered by a crowd of people assembled in front of a church belonging to the Catholic priesthood. There was a deafening noise both outside and within the building. Cries and shrieks were heard, swearing and laughter, blows of hatchets, and the sound of doors being broken in.

"What is going on here?" Vok inquired of one of the citizens.

"'Tis a vengeance upon the 'mahometans' for their insults. They cast forth all the church utensils which had formerly been used by us, pretending that they were defiled; so now we break and destroy everything of theirs. Happily the King—the chief support of the Germans and their scurvy priests—hath rendered his soul up to the devil, so we have nought to fear," the man said gloomily.

At that moment a holy statue crashed into the porch, and fragments of the organ, which had been destroyed, were flung out through a broken window.

Vok and his companions went on their way with drooping heads. But the same pictures of destruction met them wherever churches or monasteries were situated.

The great mass of the people hurled themselves furiously upon the church buildings of the hated Catholics, destroying the altars and church vessels with a ferocity hitherto unknown in the population of Prague.

Their terrible wrath had broken loose at last, and like a hurricane was devastating everything within its path.

At one place the crowd was so dense that Anna was torn apart from her companions and carried away in the opposite direction. But she was not in the least dismayed. Ever since the meeting on Mount Tabor, Zizka's sister had been known and beloved by the Hussites, and notwithstanding the crush the people now made way wherever possible for the tall figure in its perpetual mourning. The Catholics on that day had hidden themselves in terror, and dared attack nobody openly.

Making her way thus, step by step, towards her brother's house, Anna passed near the Church of St. Stephen, the prior of which was particularly unpopular with the Prague population on account of his incredible intolerance.

The sacking of the church was evidently at an end, for the people, with joyful shouts, were pouring out of it, and by their audacious whistling and hooting encouraging those who were dragging priestly vestments behind them, and tearing the costly embroidered brocades into ribbons.

A townsman noticed Anna standing near the porch.

"See how we revenge ourselves upon the 'mahometans' for trampling upon the truths of the Gospel, and how we avenge the holy martyr of Constance," he cried. "Dost thou think he sees and approves us from Heaven?"

Anna shook her head.

"I think that his angelic soul was incapable of vengeance. He preached nothing but love and forgiveness, and certainly would not approve indecorum in any sacred place. If you would in truth establish the kingdom of justice and virtue, should you not rather seek out the nests of corruption amongst us which befoul our town? 'Tis they should be destroyed!"

Those who stood by were silent; but the townsman who before had spoken cried out:

"Why, as to John Hus blaming us—all that is but the foolish chatter of a woman who can have no notions on matters of importance. 'Tis said in the Bible, '*An eye*

for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' so that we are but acting according to the Holy Book. And as to the places of corruption, where the scurvy priests drink and indulge themselves to the scandal of all good Christians, thou hast spoken truly, and we will soon attend to them. Ho, my brothers! Now for these hellish dens! We will soon pluck these birds of paradise!"

The crowd gave an approving roar in answer, and rushed off on its new errand.

Anna huddled close against the gates of a neighboring house in order to avoid being crushed; and, when the street was empty, hastened to her brother's house, which she reached without further obstacle.

Disorder still reigned in the streets, and to the sacking of churches was added the destruction of houses of pleasure, upon which the mob hurled itself with such fury that they were all laid waste to their very foundations in the New Town as well as in the Old.

When night fell, the storm for the most part died away, but passions once let loose were not so easily to be appeased.

Somebody mentioned the Carthusian monastery in Smikhov as a nest of hostile Germans which must necessarily be stamped out—and the words fell upon fruitful soil.

It was nearly ten o'clock at night when a huge crowd besieged the abbey. The gates were thrown down in a moment, and the invaders rushed into the building.

The brothers hid in the refectory, where they were

discovered by the crowd, derided for their want of courage, and terrified by hoots and threats. But notwithstanding the excitement of the crowd there were no killed or wounded, and the Hussites confined themselves to the destruction of books, food, stores, church vessels, and furniture, and to breaking into cellars, where they smashed the barrels and poured the precious liquors on to the earth.

This restraint was due in part to Broda, who, though he took an active part in the events of the day, and even led the attack upon the monastery, had no liking for killing defenseless people.

All the wrath and hatred of the old warrior and his comrades was directed against the monastery itself, and only after the monks had been dragged from the refectory and conveyed under guard to the town did they finally demolish the building and burn it to the ground.

The massive and beautiful edifice broke into flame on all sides at once, like a gigantic bonfire, scattering clouds of sparks to the winds, and startling the heavens with a blood-red glare.

And while fire and devastation were crowning this prologue to the Hussite wars—that terrible reckoning of the Bohemians with their century-long oppressors—the body of King Venceslas was being hastily embalmed and secretly conveyed from Vencelstein to Vyshegrad.

In view of the state of unrest prevailing in the town a solemn royal burial could not take place, and so in the Zbraslavsk monastery was quietly interred that monarch

around whose cradle so much hope, glory, and majesty were arrayed, and who, after a reign of fifty-six years, died unhappy and abandoned.

Outraged Bohemia was making ready to arise under her brilliant and unconquerable leader, John Zizka, the first to amaze the world by the stupendous spectacle of an armed people defending its faith and freedom.

This war, one of the most terrible that has ever drenched the earth in blood, was destined to bear the name of the meek and gentle martyr of Constance, and from end to end of his Fatherland churches and monasteries were consumed in flames in atonement for his agony.

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

It is a wondrous July night, warm and fragrant. Radiant stars are twinkling against the dark azure of the skies, and the moon is flooding earth with gentle, dreamy light.

The river winds in and out like a broad ribbon, flecked with silvery spangles; and along both its banks lies a great city, with huge and stately churches, spires, and towers of striking and fantastic architecture. Amid the handsome modern edifices, ancient buildings may be seen, their walls blackened by age, majestic witnesses of bygone days, monuments of a bloody and glorious past, wrapped in an atmosphere of mystery and legend,—invested, in a word, with that magic fascination that only the passing of centuries can bestow upon the frail creations of man.

The city of Prague—Prague the Golden Beauty. She has grown and developed during the centuries since Hus and Jerome lived and fought for their country and their faith. But her soul is unchanged. Within her, as in days of old, the heart of the ancient Bohemian land is beating. Within her its brain contrives, its genius inspires.

On this sublime July night something unusual is occurring in the city.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, it teems with life. Beacons are ablaze on the surrounding heights, and even in the mild, pellucid air, something mysterious is happening, something invisible to the eyes of men.

A marvelous being, of indefinable and misty form, is hovering above the earth. The head alone seems living, with its large, deep, stern and passionless eyes; the head of an old man, judging by the wrinkles upon the brow, and the lines of bitter disillusionment about the mouth, with its thin, compressed lips: the head of a young man, by the energy it breathes, the vigor, the consciousness of its own might. The silvery whiteness of the hair and beard mingle with the folds of the garments which envelop the figure in a filmy haze, and stretch like a nebulous mist far behind it, encircling the horizon and melting in infinity.

Floating in air, the spirit reaches the bank of the river and stops. Before it stands the remnants of a ruined wall, the hardly noticeable relic of a building which stood there in ancient times.

A beautiful and stately woman, with dark hair and large eyes shining with power and genius, is sitting amid the ruin. She is clothed in snow-white garments, and a golden circlet confines the transparent covering of her head.

"I greet thee, Time," she says, raising her eyes to the old man. "It is long since I beheld thy face. I have but felt thee passing near me."

"I find thee still at thy post, my poor Lubusha," he answers. "When at last wilt thou pass to thy rest?"

"How can I rest when my beloved people still fight and suffer, and their fierce and ancient enemy, still greedy and audacious, plans their destruction and rends their bodies with its claws?"

"And dost thou still weep and despair?"

Lubusha proudly raises her head.

"Nay. I pray and hope, because my people are wise and mighty, patient and persistent, and forget not their past glory."

She lifts her transparent hand and points to the fires upon the hilltops.

"Seest thou those flames? They were lit by Bohemians faithful to the memory of Hus and of Jerome, in honor of their martyrdom. To-day is the 6th of July, the anniversary of the infamous condemnation of the martyr of Constance. The love and reverence of a million hearts draw hither the valiant souls of Hus and his friends. Behold! Dost thou see sparks, the sheathes of which fly forth from the fires and are borne upon the wind? They are the ashes of the two champions come to life! Those sparks are animated by their thoughts. They soar and descend upon the people's hearts like living fire, and kindle them with inextinguishable love for their country, and a valor which makes them invincible."

A vague murmur arises in the distance, and grows louder and louder until it swells into the confused clamor

of an approaching multitude. Innumerable shadowy forms draw near.

An army is approaching. With heavy measured steps it draws nearer and nearer, and the clank of swords is clearly heard, the rattle of chains, the rumbling of wheels, and the neighing of horses. A tall old man at the head of the army carries a standard on which a chalice of gold gleams bright. He is followed by warriors armed with spears and daggers, flails and clubs, with hatchets, swords, and halberds. The majority are dressed in peasant garb. Their stern faces breathe such assurance in their indomitable strength, such scorn of death, such passionate faith in their holy cause, that every obstacle must needs fall before them.

The human avalanche moves slowly but steadily forward, like an elemental force which nothing can stay, and behind it the heavy carts come rumbling, girdled with iron and hung with chains: the fearful moving fortresses of the Hussite armies.

"Who, then, are these warriors who spring forth from the folds of my garments, where the past of all nations is hidden?" asks Time.

"The fearless hordes of Zizka, whom he led from victory to victory, and who caused their foes to tremble!" Lubusha answers proudly. "The ancient Bohemian land comes back to life upon this holy night. . . . The land drenched in blood, and sown with the bones of giants who fell for their country and the chalice. Dost thou hear their war-song?

"'Thy heritage reject not,
Thy leader's word neglect not,
Thy comrades bold forsake not:
Stand firm unto the end!'"

"Whither go they?"

"To Mount Blanik, near Tabor. There Zizka sleeps with his chiefs, waiting for the voice of the people to call him forth to the decisive battle for his country's fate. They go to awaken him: 'Rise, Zizka. The time is come!' The Hussites have not yet spoken their last word!"

Lubusha is silent, and with her eyes follows the martial shadows which are passing. And she listens.

From the distance come the words:

"To arms now, my brothers!
Strike hard at the foe,
Shout, 'God is our Father!'
Spread havoc and woe!"

Her form begins to fade away, and melts into the air like a light mist dispersed by the breeze.

THE END

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